THE CHRIST STORY
FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

ABRAHAM MITRIE RIHBANY

The Christ Story

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By Abraham Mitrie Rihbany

Illustrated By Gustaf Tenggren

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Author of "The Syrian Christ," "A Far Journey," "Wise Men from the East and from the West," etc.

SINCE the story of Christ was first told so many centuries ago, there have been numberless attempts at further interpretations; but few, if any, have surpassed "The Syrian Christ." Now Dr. Rihbany has been persuaded to retell the story in a similar form for boys and girls.

In 1891, the author, the son of a stone-mason of the Province of Mount Lebanon, arrived at Ellis Island with nine cents in his pocket. Today he is an American clergyman, and an author whose interpretations of Oriental life and thought are a permanent contribution to our literature. In the Palestine of his youth the time of Christ did not seem very distant. The vine and fig tree, the threshing floor and the sheepfold which were so interwoven with Christ's life and teaching are all a part of Dr. Rihbany's childhood. Because of this background, Dr. Rihbany has been able to interpret the life of Jesus with sympathy and understanding. In his hands, the story, so often retold, becomes a vivid, living thing that will be a source of joy and inspiration to every young reader.

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THE SHEPHERD

The Christ Story

For Boys and Girls

By Abraham Mitrie Rihbany

Illustrated By

Gustaf Tenggren

Houghton Mifflin Company

Boston and New York

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PREFACE

SINCE the publication, a few years ago, of my book *The Syrian Christ*, many requests have come to me to prepare an edition of that work for young readers. The present little volume, *The Christ Story, For Boys and Girls*, is my attempt to comply with those requests.

The Syrian Christ has won favor with Christian denominations throughout the English-speaking world. Therefore, the many insistent demands have been, not for a conventional "life of Christ," but for the adaptation of the subject-matter found in the older volume, for the use of young readers. I have been asked to preserve the Christ story

I have told before, with all its fascination of reality and warmth of local color.

In my present attempt to meet this demand I have not contented myself with simply preparing a shorter edition of my older book. Much of the material drawn from that work has been thoroughly recast. New material has been used in many places, and an entirely new chapter on "The Boyhood of Jesus" included in the present publication. So *The Christ Story, For Boys and Girls,* has a character of its own, as though it had been written with no reference to any other publication.

I have retained of *The Syrian Christ* almost intact, such chapters as "The Star," "Mystic Tones," "The Shepherd," and "The Vineyards and the Fields," because I did not think they could be advantageously rewritten. The Syrian skies which smiled upon the Master, and the fields and vineyards in which he walked, cannot possibly be one thing for the youth, and another thing for maturer minds. I have also omitted, or meant to omit, all

passages and chapters in which I thought the youth could have no lively interest.

In writing for the young some authors yield to the temptation of over-simplifying the language. This I have tried rather to resist than to obey. It is not always possible for any one to know fully what boys and girls, say from ten to sixteen, are capable of understanding. My own idea is that they are able to *realize* the meanings of more words than they are generally given credit for. The fact that they are not always able to *define* the words which they do understand does not differentiate them from their elders, nor is it a clear evidence of their lack of understanding. I have written this book for *bright* boys and girls, of whom I am certain there are millions.

As the book itself will, I trust, show, my purpose in it is not to study the life of Christ on all its sides, but to describe him as an Oriental teacher. For I am convinced that acquaintance with the life he lived and with his manner of speech cannot fail to give the reader a clearer and more sympathetic under-

standing of Christ's Gospel of truth and love. My strong hope is that the interest of my young readers in this book may lead them later to read not only *The Syrian Christ*, but the Gospels themselves, with a new and deeper interest: that they may draw nearer to him whose words are life — the Spiritual Master of the Ages.

ABRAHAM MITRIE RIHBANY

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
U.S.A.

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THE CHRIST STORY FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

* * *

CHAPTER I

SON OF THE EAST

No doubt many of my young readers know that the word "Orient" means that part of the heavens where the sun rises, and the word "Occident," that part where the sun sets. So when we say "the Orient," with the definite article, we mean the East, and when we say "the Occident" we mean the West. The Oriental or Eastern peoples are those which inhabit Asia, and the Occidental or

Western peoples are those which inhabit Europe and America.

By birth Jesus was an Oriental. I speak of him as "the Syrian Christ" because he was born in the little Asiatic country, Syria. For the same reason I call him also in the title of this chapter "Son of the East."

But this one thing should be kept clearly in mind. As the incarnation of the spirit of God, as teacher of the truths of the spiritual life, and preacher of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, Jesus belongs to no one country.

As a prophet and a seer Jesus belongs to all races and all ages. Wherever the minds of men respond to simple truth, wherever the hearts of men thrill with pure love, wherever a temple of religion is dedicated to the worship of God and the service of man, there is Jesus' country and there are his friends. Therefore, in speaking of him as the son of a certain country, I do not mean in the least to localize his Gospel, or to set bounds and limits to the flow of his spirit and the workings of his love.

My purpose in this writing is to remind the reader that, whatever else Jesus was, as regards his habits of thought and life and his method of teaching, he was a Syrian of the Syrians. In Syria he was born; there he grew up to manhood, taught his Gospel, and died for it.

It is most natural, then, that Gospel truths should have come down to the present time — and to the nations of the West — cast in Oriental moulds of thought, and closely intermingled with the simple domestic and social habits of Syria. The gold of the Gospel carries with it the sand and dust of its original home.

From the foregoing, therefore, it may be seen that my reason for undertaking to throw fresh light on the life and teachings of Christ, and other portions of the Bible whose correct understanding depends on accurate knowledge of their original surroundings, is not any claim on my part to great learning. The real reason is rather an accident of birth. From the fact that I was born not far from where

the Master was born, and brought up under almost the identical conditions under which he lived, I have an "inside view" of the Bible which, as a matter of course, a Westerner cannot have. And I know that the conditions of life in Syria of to-day are essentially as they were in the time of Christ, from the simple fact that, as a sojourner in this Western world, whenever I open my Bible it reads like a letter from home.

Its unrestrained flow of expression, its vivid, almost flashy imagery, its simple stories and parables, as well as its deep, spiritual tones — so far as these qualities are concerned, the Bible might all have been written in my primitive village home, on the western slopes of Mount Lebanon, some thirty years ago.

Nor do I mean to say that the Western world has never succeeded in knowing the mind of Christ. Such an assertion would do great injustice, not only to the Occidental mind, but to the Gospel itself as well, by making it a riddle, utterly strange to the majority of mankind. But what I have

learned from my study of the Western mind, during more than a score of years in the American pulpit, is that, with the exception of the few specialists, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for a people to understand fully a literature which has not sprung from that people's own racial life. As a storehouse of divine revelation the Bible knows no geographical limits. Its spiritual truths are from God to man. But as a book the Bible is an imported article in the Western world, especially in the home of the Anglo-Saxon race. The language of the Scriptures, the habits of life which form the setting of their spiritual teachings, and the poetical charms of those teachings themselves, have come forth from the soul of a people far removed from the races of the West in almost all the modes of its earthly life. The fact is, you cannot study the life of a people successfully from the outside. You may by so doing succeed in knowing the few external habits, but not the deep qualities of a people's real character. You cannot, for example, know

the real life of America by simply traveling in it for a few months and taking pictures of its people as you see them on the streets.

From the foregoing it may be seen that I deem it rather risky for a six-weeks tourist in that country to publish a book on the *life* of Syria. A first-class camera and "an eye to business" are hardly sufficient qualifications for the accomplishment of such a task. It is very easy, indeed, to take a photograph, but not so easy to connect such a picture with the inner life of a race, and to know what moral and social forces lie behind it. The hasty traveler may easily state what certain habits of thought and life in a strange land mean to *him*, but does that necessarily mean that *his* understanding of such things is also the understanding of the *people* of that land themselves?

Let me give an example here from my own experience as a Syrian immigrant. At about the end of my second year of residence in this country, I felt sure that I could write a book on America and the Americans, which

would be accepted as correct by every one. It was so easy for me to grasp the significance of certain general appearances of American life that I felt I was fully able to state how the American people lived, what their racial, political, and religious ideas and feelings were, what their forms of speech meant, and so forth, with perfect accuracy and ease. But now, after a residence of so many years in America — years which I have spent in closest association with Americans, largely of the "original stock" — I do not feel half so confident that I am qualified to write such a book. The more I know about America and the Americans, men, women, and children, the more fully do I realize how extremely difficult, if not impossible, it is for one to interpret successfully the life of another people before one has actually *lived it* himself.

Many Westerners have written very good books on the thought and life of the East. But these are not of the "tourist" type. Such writers have been those who, first, had the wisdom to realize that the beggars for *bakh-*

sheesh in the streets of Syrian cities, and those who hitch a woman with an ox to the plough in some dark corners of Palestine, did not possibly represent the deep soul of that ancient East, which gave birth to the Bible and to the glorious company of prophets, apostles, and saints. Second, such writers knew, also, that the fine roots of a people's life do not lie on the surface. Such feeders of life are both deep and fine; not only long residence among a people, but actual living and real sympathy with them are necessary to reveal to a stranger the hidden meaning of their life. Social life, like plant life, works from within, and from within it must be studied.

And it is those common things of Syrian life, so closely mixed with the spiritual truths of the Bible, which cause the Western readers of holy writ to stumble, and which for them rob those truths of much of their richness.

From what I have already said you can easily see what my purpose in this book is. I wish to take you with me into the inner circles of Syrian life — the life which Jesus

lived and which I, also, lived in my youth. When you become acquainted with that Eastern life, you will see how easy it is for a humble fellow countryman of Christ like myself to understand the real meaning of so many scriptural sayings which so greatly puzzle the minds of Western readers of the Bible.

CHAPTER II

BIRTH OF A MAN CHILD

The girls among my readers may wonder why I speak only of the birth of a *man* child. They may be curious to know whether daughters are not loved in Syrian homes as sons are.

It would be impossible to answer these questions fully in a brief statement. I shall speak at more length of the position of woman in Syrian society in later chapters. Here I will only say that sons and daughters of Syrian families are loved alike by their parents. In this respect neither the Bible nor later Eastern customs make a difference between boys and girls. To the Syrians (I speak more particularly of the Christians) "children," as

the psalmist says, "are a heritage from the Lord." And of course the word "children" includes both boys and girls. God gives them both to their parents and they accept them, love and care for them as God's gift.

So in the East there is more rejoicing in the home and among the friends of the family when a son is born than when a daughter is born, not because daughters are not loved, but for other reasons.

In the first place, as in America and other countries of the West, the son continues the family name, while the daughter takes the name of her husband. From ancient times families have been very anxious to have their name live after them. In the second place, the inheritance of the priestly office, which is a great blessing, could be secured only by the son — the "first-born" son. In the third place, only the sons could be soldiers and defend the clan and the nation. In the fourth place, the man is the bread-winner and the chief support of the family.

For these and other reasons, sons in the

East have been and are considered of more value than daughters. In the past such ideas prevailed also in Western countries to a great extent. They still persist in certain parts of Europe to this day. But with the prevalence of education and freedom for both men and women, such ideas have largely disappeared among the great nations of the West, especially the English-speaking countries.

But in this book we are chiefly concerned with Jesus' story. In the story of his birth we have so many things which are so strange to Western readers of the Bible that many of them do not realize that to Easterners such things are very familiar. In the Gospel story of Jesus' life there is not a single incident that is not in perfect harmony with the thought and current speech of the land of its origin. I do not know how many times I heard it stated in my native land and at our own fireside that heavenly messengers in the forms of patron saints or angels came to good wives, in dreams and visions, and cheered them with the promise of a child. It was nothing un-

common for such women to spend a whole night in a shrine "wrestling in prayer," either with the blessed Virgin or some other saint, for such a divine assurance; and I remember a few of my own kindred to have done so.

Perhaps the most romantic religious practice in this connection is the *zeara*. Interpreted literally, the word *zeara* means simply a visit. In its social use it is the equivalent of a call of long or short duration. But religiously the *zeara* means a pilgrimage to a shrine.

However, strictly speaking, the word "pilgrimage" means to the Syrians a journey of great religious significance whose supreme purpose is the securing of a blessing for the pilgrim, with no reference to a special need. The *zeara* is a pilgrimage with a specific purpose. The *zayir* (visitor to a shrine) comes seeking either to be healed of a certain ailment, to atone for a sin, or to be divinely helped in some other way. Unlike a pilgrimage also, a *zeara* may be made by one person in behalf of another. When, for example, a person is too ill to travel, or is indifferent to a spiritual

need which such a visit is supposed to fill, his parents or other close friends may make a *zeara* in his behalf. But much more often a *zeara* is undertaken by women for the purpose of securing the blessing of having children, or consecrating the promised child (if it should prove to be a male) to God and to the patron saint of the visited sanctuary.

Again the word "pilgrimage" is used only to describe a visit by a Christian to Jerusalem, or by a Mohammedan to Mecca, while the *zeara* describes a visit to any one of the lesser shrines.

The happy journey is often made on foot, the parties most concerned walking all the way "on the flesh of their feet"; that is, with neither shoes nor sandals on. This great sacrifice is made as a mark of sincere humility which is deemed to be pleasing to God and his holy saints. However, the wearing of shoes and even the use of mounts is not considered a sinful practice on such occasions, and is indulged in by many of the well-to-do families. The state of the heart is, of course, the chief thing to be considered.

Fasting and prayer on the way are often practiced during a *zeara*. However, feasting, especially by the men in the company, and noisy gayety are not deemed altogether out of harmony with the sacredness of the occasion. The pious visitors carry with them presents to the abbot and to the monks who serve the shrine. A silver or even gold candlestick, or a crown of either metal for the saint, is also carried to the altar. The young mother in whose behalf the *zeara* is undertaken is tenderly cared for by every member of the party. She is "the chosen vessel of the Lord."

The *zûwar* (visitors) remain at the holy shrine for one or two nights, or until the "presence" is revealed; that is, until the saint appears. This happens almost always in a dream, either to the mother or to some other worthy in the party.

How like the story of Joseph all this is! In the first chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, the twentieth verse, it is said of Joseph, "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared

unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins."

In this manner the promise is made to the waiting mother, who "keeps these things, and ponders them in her heart."

The promise thus secured, the mother and the father vow that the child shall be a *nedher;* that is, consecrated to the saint who made the promise to the mother. The vow may mean one of several things: either that a sum of money be "given to the saint" upon the arrival of the child, or that the child be carried to the same sanctuary on another *zeara* with gifts, and so forth. It may be also that his hair shall not be cut until he is seven years old, and then cut for the first time before the image of his patron saint at the shrine, or some other religious act.

The last form of a vow, the consecration of the hair of the head for a certain period, is

practiced by men of all ages. The vow is made as a petition for healing from a serious illness, rescue from danger, or purely as an act of consecration. Saint Paul had such an experience. In the eighteenth chapter of the Book of Acts, the eighteenth verse, we have the statement: "And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; *having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.*"

The following incident carries me back to the days of my childhood. I go back in thought to those romantic days when as a boy I was permitted to join a happy company on a *zeara.* It was not the only one, but, if I remember right, it was the last one of the kind I enjoyed in ancient Syria. A very gay company that was, consisting of about ten or twelve persons. Songs and stories cheered our journey. I was permitted to ride on a donkey part of the way and made to walk the remaining distance. But the thought of the

sacredness of the occasion made us all feel happy, whether we rode or walked on those rough and stony roads.

The sacred visit was made for a cousin of mine, a boy of twelve, who was a *nedher*, or, as the word is rendered in the English Bible, a Nazarite. We assembled in the church of Saint George of Sûk. The occasion was very solemn. A mass was celebrated after the order of the Greek Orthodox Church. Near the close of the service the tender lad was brought by his parents in front of the Royal Door at the altar. While repeating a prayer, the priest cut the hair on the crown of the boy's head with the scissors, in the shape of a cross. The simple act released the child and his parents of their solemn vow.

Naturally, some will be inclined to call such practices superstitious. To a certain extent they are. But this pertains only to the way in which the divine life is sought. What really interests us is the true meaning and purpose of such practices.

What is there in such religious practices as

those I have mentioned but the expression of the loving care of those parents for the spiritual welfare and security of their children? What do we find here but evidences of a deep and sincere desire for divine blessings to come upon the family and the home? Thoughts of God at the marriage altar; thoughts of God when a child comes into the world; thoughts of God and of his holy prophets and saints as friends and companions in all the changes and chances of the world. Do we to-day have anything better than all this? If so, then let us give it to the world and not simply be satisfied with talking against superstition.

CHAPTER III

THE BABE IN THE MANGER

In a most literal sense we always understood the saying of the psalmist, "Children are a heritage from the Lord." Above and beyond all natural agencies, it was He who worked the miracle of birth. From this it may be inferred how tenderly and reverently agreeable to the Syrian ear is the angel's salutation to Mary, "Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women! — Behold thou shalt . . . bring forth a son." [1]

From the days of Israel to the present time, childlessness has been looked upon as a sign

[1] Luke I, 28, 31.

of divine disfavor. Rachel's cry, "Give me children, or else I die," [1] does not exaggerate the agony of a childless Syrian wife. When Rebecca was about to depart from her father's house to become Isaac's wife, her mother's sincerest wish for her was, "Be thou the mother of thousands of millions." [2] This mother's last message to her daughter was not spoken in a corner. I can see her following the bride to the door, lifting her open palms and turning her face toward heaven, and making her affectionate petition in the hearing of a multitude of guests, who must have echoed her words in chorus.

From this it may be seen that the Syrians and Eastern peoples in general talk more about the birth of children in public than Western peoples do, especially in English-speaking countries. For example, in the congratulations of guests at a marriage feast the chief wish for the bridegroom and bride always is: "May you be happy, live long, and have many children!" Much mirth is en-

[1] Gen. xxx, 1. [2] Gen. xxiv, 60.

joyed in such cases, also, when friends and neighbors, by consulting the stars, or computing the number of letters in the names of the parents and the month in which the miracle of birth is supposed to occur, undertake to foretell whether the promised offspring will be a son or a daughter. In that part of the country where I was brought up, such wise foretellers believed, and made us all believe, that if the calculations resulted in an odd number the birth would be a son, but if in an even number, a daughter.

Such ideas about the birth of children do not prevail in America. Americans may have these ideas and wishes, but they do not express them so openly as the Easterners do. The real secret of this difference is to be found in something deeper than a mere social custom. The center of life in the East is first religious, then social. So to Eastern peoples birth in all the world of life is most deeply sacred. It is God's life reproducing itself in the life of man and in the living world below man; therefore the evidences of this repro-

duction should be looked upon and spoken of with rejoicing.

Notwithstanding the many intellectual changes which I have undergone in this country of my adoption, I count as among the most precious memories of my childhood my going with my father to the vineyard, just as the vines began to "come out," and hearing him say as he touched the swelling buds, "Blessed be the Creator. He is the Supreme Giver. May He protect the blessed increase." Of this I almost always think when I read the words of the psalmist, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof!"

Here we have the background of the stories of Sarah, when the angel-guest prophesied a son for her in her old age; of Rebecca, and the wish of her mother for her, that she might become "the mother of thousands"; of Elizabeth, and of Mary, Jesus' mother.

Here it is explained, also, why upon the birth of a "man child," well-wishers troop into the house, — even on the very day of birth, — bring their presents, and congratu-

late the parents on the divine gift to them. It was because of this custom that those strangers, the three "Wise Men" and Magi of the Far East, were permitted to come in and see the little Galilean family, while the mother was yet in childbed. So runs the Gospel narrative: "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts — gold, frankincense, and myrrh." [1]

At the present time the gifts which the guests bring with them to the newborn child and his mother are not gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They bring sugar, confections, and such articles of food as the mother can eat. Sometimes little garments for the babe are also given. The confections brought on the occasion are used for the entertainment of the guests.

So also were the humble shepherds privileged to see the wondrous child shortly after

[1] Matt. II, 11.

birth. "And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go to Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger." [1]

In the twelfth verse of the second chapter of the Gospel of Saint Luke, the English version says, "And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Here the word "clothes" is somewhat misleading. The Arabic version gives a perfect rendering of the fact by saying, "Ye shall find a *swaddled* babe *laid* in a manger."

According to general Syrian custom, in earliest infancy a child is not really clothed, it is only swaddled. Upon birth the infant is washed in tepid water, then salted, or rubbed gently with salt pulverized in a stone mortar especially for the occasion. (The salt com-

[1] Luke II, 15–16.

monly used in Syrian homes is coarse-chipped.) Next the babe is sprinkled with *rehan* — a powder made of dried myrtle leaves — and then swaddled.

The swaddle is a piece of stout cloth about a yard square, to one corner of which is attached a long narrow band. The infant, with its arms pressed close to its sides, and its feet stretched full length and laid close together, is wrapped in the swaddle, and the narrow band wound around the little body, from the shoulders to the ankles, giving the little one the exact appearance of an Egyptian mummy. Only a few of the good things of this mortal life were more pleasant to me when I was a boy than to carry in my arms a swaddled babe. The "salted" and "peppered" little creature felt so soft and so light, and was so appealingly helpless, that to cuddle it was to me an unspeakable benediction.

Such was the "babe of Bethlehem" that was sought by the Wise Men and the shepherds in the wondrous story of the Nativity.

CHAPTER IV

THE STAR

How natural to the thought of the East the story of the "star of Bethlehem" is! To the Orientals "the heavens declare the glory of God," and the stars reveal many wondrous things to men. They are the messengers of good and evil, and objects of the most noble thoughts, as well as of the crudest superstitions.

Those who have gazed upon the stars in the deep, clear Syrian heavens can find no difficulty in entering into the spirit of the majestic strains of the writer of the eighth Psalm. "When I consider thy heavens," says this ancient singer, "the work of thy fingers,

the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" Deeps beyond deeps are revealed through that dry, soft, and clear atmosphere of the "land of promise," yet the constellations seem as near to the beholder as parlor lamps. "My soul longeth" for the vision of the heavens from the heights of my native Lebanon, and the hills of Palestine. It is no wonder to me that my people have always considered the stars as guides and companions, and as awe-inspiring manifestations of the Creator's power, wisdom, and glory. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night sheweth knowledge." [1]

So great is the host of the stars seen by the naked eye in that land that the people of Syria have always likened a great multitude to the stars of heaven or the sand of the sea. Of a great assemblage of people we always

[1] Ps. xix, 1-2.

THE THREE WISE MEN

said, "They are *methel-ennijoom* — like the stars" (in number). So it is written in the twenty-eighth chapter of Deuteronomy, the sixty-second verse, "And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were *as the stars of heaven for multitude;* because thou wouldst not obey the voice of the Lord thy God." According to that great narrative in Genesis, God promised Abraham that his descendants should be as the stars in number. In the fifteenth chapter, the fifth verse, it is said, "And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be."

But the numberless lights of the firmament were brought even closer to us through the belief that they had vital connection with the lives of men on the earth. I was brought up to believe that every human being had a star in heaven which held the secret of his life and which watched over him wherever he went. In speaking of an amiable person it is said, "His star is attractive" (*nejmo jeddeeb*).

Persons love one another when "their stars are in harmony." A person is in unfavorable circumstances when his star is in the sphere of "misfortune" (*nehiss*), and so forth. The stars indicated the time to us when we were traveling by night, marked the seasons, and thus fulfilled their Creator's purpose by serving "for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years."

In every community we had "star-gazers" who could tell each person's star. We placed much confidence in such mysterious men, who could "arrest" an absent person's star in its course and learn from it whether it was well or ill with the absent one.

Like a far-away dream, it comes to me that as a child of about ten I went out one night with my mother to seek a "star-gazer" to locate my father's star and question the shining orb about him. My father had been away from home for some time, and owing to the meagerness of the means of communication in that country, especially in those days, we had no news of him at all.

During that afternoon my mother said that she felt "heavy-hearted" for no reason that she knew; therefore she feared that some ill must have befallen the head of our household, and sought to "know" whether her fear was well grounded. The "star-arrester," leaning against an aged mulberry tree, turned his eyes toward the starry heavens, while his lips moved rapidly and silently as if he were repeating words of the greatest importance. Presently he said, "I see him. He is sitting on a cushion, leaning against the wall and smoking his *narghile*. There are others with him, and he is in his usual health." The man took pains to point out the "star" to my mother, who, after much sympathetic effort, felt inclined to say that she did see what the star-gazer claimed he saw. But at any rate, mother declared that she was no longer "heavy-hearted."

In my most keen eagerness to see my father and his *narghile* in the star, at least for mere intellectual delight, I clung to the arm of the reader of the heavens like a frightened kitten,

and insisted upon "seeing." The harder he tried to shake me off, the deeper did my fingers sink into his sleeve. At last the combined efforts of my mother and the heir of the ancient astrologers forced me to believe that I was "too young to behold such sights."

It was when the Israelites turned so often to the stars that they almost worshiped them that Isaiah said to that people: "Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flames."

Beyond all such crudities, however, lies the great and strengthening belief that the stars are alive with God. The lofty tones of such scriptural passages as the nineteenth Psalm, and the beautiful story of the star of Bethlehem, indicate that to the Oriental mind the "hosts of heaven" are no mere masses of dust, but the agencies of the Creator's might and

love. So the narrative of the Nativity in our Gospel glorifies the beliefs of the Orientals about God's purpose in those lights of the firmament, by making the guide of the Wise Men to the birthplace of the Prince of Peace a great star. The pure and serene light of that star symbolized the peace and holiness which, in the "fullness of time," his kingdom shall bring upon the earth.

The presentation of a child at the temple, or the "admittance of an infant into the Church," is one of the most tender, most beautiful, and most impressive services of my Mother Church — the Greek Orthodox.[1] It is held for every child born within that fold, in commemoration of the presentation of Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. As St. Luke tells us (II, 22), "And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord."

The child is presented at the church when forty days old. On the first Sabbath day

[1] See my autobiography, *A Far Journey*, p. 4.

after the "forty days," the mother carries the infant to the door of the church during mass, where the robed priest, who has been previously applied to for the sacred rite, meets the mother and receives the child in his arms. After making the sign of the cross with the child at the door, the priest says, "Now enters the servant of God [naming the child] into the Holy Church, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen." Then the priest walks into the church with the child, saying, in its behalf, "I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple." [1]

With these and other appropriate words from the Scriptures, the priest carries the child into the *mizbeh*, which corresponds to the "holy place" in the ancient temple. Here he walks around the *maideh* (altar of sacrifice), makes the sign of the cross with the child, and walks out into the midst of the congregation. In this position the priest

[1] Ps. v, 7.

utters as his final petition the words of the aged Simeon, who presented Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem,[1] "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." Then he delivers the child back to its mother.

[1] Luke II, 29.

CHAPTER V

MYSTIC TONES

I LOVE to listen to the mystic tones of the Christmas carol. The story of the "star of Bethlehem" is the means of transmission of those deeper tones which have come into the world through the soul of that ancient East. I love to mingle with the social joys of the Christmas season, and its spirit of good-will, the mystic accents of the ancient seers: those seers who expressed in the rich narratives of the New Testament the deepest and dearest hopes of the soul.

In the second chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel the story of the Nativity is presented in a most exquisite poetical form. The vision

of humble shepherds, wise men, and angels, mingling together in the joy of a new divine revelation, could have been caught only by a deep-visioned spiritual artist.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night.

"And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

"And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

When the angel delivered his message to

the effect that God had visited his people in the person of the new-born Christ, then the humble, unlettered shepherds heard the heavenly song, which gave God the glory, and prophesied peace and good-will for all mankind. Could there be anything more truly expressive of the deepest hopes of the human soul than this picture? Even the rough shepherds, being living souls, could realize that when the divine and the human met heaven and earth became one, and peace and good-will prevailed among men. What encouragement, what hope this vision holds out even to the humblest among men! What assurance that heaven with all its treasures of peace and love is so near to our dust!

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings." The shepherds looked up to heaven through the eyes of all mankind. It was the upward look of a world-old hope. No soul ever looked up to heaven with different results. The divine response always is, "Fear not, for I bring you good tidings!" No soul ever needs to dwell

in doubt and fear. No soul ever needs to be lonely and forlorn. Heaven has nothing for us but "good tidings of great joy." The higher powers are near at hand, and the soul of man may have invisible companions.

Again we learn from this New Testament passage that in the visit of the shepherds and the Wise Men to the holy child both were equally blest. Both those who were learned and wise and the simple-minded sons of the desert stood at the shrine of the holy child as naked souls, divested of all artificial human distinctions. There were no "assigned" pews in that little shrine. All those who came into it by way of the heart received a blessing, and went away praising God. Here we have a foregleam of that longed-for kingdom of God — the home of all aspiring and seeking souls, regardless of rank and station.

> "There is no great and no small
> To the soul that maketh all:
> And where it cometh, all things are;
> And it cometh everywhere."

The Christmas carol is dear to the human

heart because it is a song of spiritual faith and not of doubt. To doubt the heavens are closed and silent; the world has no windows opening toward the Infinite. Doubt can neither pray nor sing.

And here I would like to ask: Whither is the spirit of the present age leading us? Are we drifting away from the mount of vision? There seems to be but little room in this vast life of ours for spiritual dreams and visions. The combination of our commercial activities and the never-ceasing whir of the wheels of our industries close up our senses to the intimate whisperings of the divine spirit. We see, but with the outward eye. We hear, but with the outward ear. The things of this life are too much with us, and they prevent us from seeing the gracious beckonings of the higher world. Let not the lesser interests of this life close our hearing to the angel-song which never dies upon the air. The star of hope never sets, and God's revelations are from everlasting to everlasting.

CHAPTER VI

THE BOYHOOD OF JESUS

I HAVE often been asked to write a book on the boyhood of Jesus. It has always seemed to me that no one could write a whole book on the Master's boyhood, because the New Testament says very little about it.

The story of Jesus' life as we find it in the Gospels is not like the story of Napoleon, or Lincoln, or any modern great man. In fact, we do not find such biographies as these anywhere in the Bible. Very little is said in the great Book about the boyhood of any of the great prophets. Something is said about the parents, the birth, and early childhood of some of the Bible characters, but only very little.

We find this in the stories of Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, John the Baptist, and Jesus. But in none of these records do we find the full story of the great man's boyhood, nor, indeed, of his manhood. We are not told, for example, as in modern stories of great men, what the prophet's daily habits of life were, how he lived with his neighbors and associates, what his favorite games and books were, how he spent his time when he was not teaching, and so forth.

The real reason here is not very difficult to find. In the first place the ancients seem to have been interested only in a great man's mission, and not in the details of his life as a man. What he did teach as a prophet, or did as a ruler of his people, was the thing which made his name live. In the second place, the Bible is a religious, and not an historical book. It is concerned first of all with the messages and missions of the prophets and apostles of our religion. All its historical teachings are secondary to this. So when the people were told what the man, whom God

had chosen to be his messenger, said and did, they did not care about the story of his life before he appeared in the world as a prophet.

It is for this reason that we do not have the full story of Jesus' boyhood. The people of his time were interested in him as a healer, teacher, and savior of his people from their sins. It is such a picture of him that we have in the Gospels, with only a brief reference to his childhood and youth. Besides the story of his birth and the description of him as a "swaddled babe," one single incident only is mentioned. It is his going with his parents on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem when he was twelve years old, which will be described in the following chapter.

What, then, do I propose to give my young readers in this chapter on the subject of Jesus' boyhood? Is it to repeat what is said about him in the Gospel story and then make a sermon of it? No.

What I propose to do is to give an account of boy life in Syria. Of course this is not giving an exact account of Jesus' boyhood, but

it may be something like it. In the opening chapter of this book I said that when I read the Bible it sounds like a letter from home. That means that the habits of life among the common people of Syria are very much the same to-day as they were in Jesus' time. So it is reasonable to believe that Jesus lived in many respects as the boys of modern Syria live. And it should be kept in mind that in this work we are concerned with the common people of that country, of which Jesus was one, and not with the few rich families who generally live after the European fashion. Jesus' home, as every one of my readers will remember, was that of a carpenter.

Child life in the East is not so extensive, and, consequently, not so *expensive*, as in the West. Nor is it so carefully studied. Children are dearly loved and cared for by their parents, but in a very simple manner. The many "child foods" known to the American home are scarcely known in Syria. Infants are fed on mothers' milk, and as soon as they are able to eat other things they are given small quan-

tities of the same food the parents eat. Up to even a few years ago doctors were almost unknown in the towns and villages of Syria. Therefore the children there escaped many of the unwelcome experiences which American children have to endure. Of course, Syrian children have their aches and pains. Measles and mumps and coughs and other exciting things come to them, but they are all treated by the older folk. Home remedies are resorted to, such as the juices of certain vegetables, olive oil, water of flowers (that is, the distilled essence of roses and other flowers, home-made), and the like. As in America, some children get well, others do not.

At the present time schools are found not only in the cities, but in many of the big villages and towns of Syria, but in my childhood days they were very few. Then only a very small number of boys, and a much smaller number of girls, could read and write, and that very simply. Apparently Jesus was one of that small number, because he could read.

Consequently books were very rare in Syria; and even now the "home library" is rarely found in other than the homes of the rich and of the educated few. The thousands of children's books which are enjoyed in America and other Western countries are rarely if ever found in Syria. In my early years the children were first taught the alphabet and a few simple words, and then given the Book of Psalms and other books of the Bible to read. Besides this a few simple lessons in arithmetic completed their education. We had no newspapers, no magazines, and no public libraries.

Of course, under such conditions the children could not sit down and listen to stories read to them by their parents; nor bury their own heads in finely illustrated story books and read for themselves. Our chief pleasure along this line came from story-telling. Our parents would tell us simple short stories about saints, spirits or djinn, and wild beasts. We listened in the dim light of a small oil lamp, with shivers running up and down our backs,

to the thrilling stories about wolves and hyenas. We shivered still more frightfully, yet we liked the experience, at the stories of the awful djinn! We were told how they could balance themselves in the air, come in through the walls of the house and through closed doors, with great ease; how they choked naughty people, or twisted their lower jaws and left them twisted, and nobody could straighten them out; how also they rewarded persons who were good to them by bringing them charms with which they could bewitch other people, or tell them where they could find treasures, and so forth. After hearing such stories about such fearful creatures, it was no easy matter for us to go to bed with any peace of mind. Yet the whole thing was very agreeably "exciting."

But the most absorbing stories for young and old were those long tales (*hekayat*) which were told by real story-tellers at our evening home gatherings. They were much like the stories of the Arabian Nights. In almost every town there were a few, generally men, who

could tell such tales. We would all sit on the cushioned floor after the Oriental custom, with our legs folded under us, and listen with all our might the whole evening. The subject of the story might be a king of the past, a hero, the digging of a great treasure, a war over some love affair, or some other exciting thing. As we listened with increasing eagerness to the wondrous tale, the story-teller himself seemed to us to be the greatest wonder. We thought he knew everything that ever happened in the whole world.

I feel certain that Jesus must have listened to such narratives in his boyhood, especially those of the heroes of his own people, Israel. This custom is very old in the East. The great Bible stories found in the Book of Genesis — the stories of Cain and Abel, of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and other Old Testament characters — were taught to the people by story-tellers for generations before they were written down and put together in their present form in the Bible. The "eagle" parable or riddle in the seventeenth chapter

of the Book of the prophet Ezekiel is one of those thrilling Bible stories. It begins, "Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel; and say, Thus saith the Lord: A great eagle with great wings, and long pinions, full of feathers, which had divers colors, came unto Lebanon, and took the top of the cedars," and so forth. Jesus himself told such stories in the form of parables.

In the absence of theaters and other amusement houses, our entertainments were few and simple. The coming of the rope-walker to town was a very exciting event. The strange man stretches his long thick rope between buildings high above our heads and begins to beat on his drum. The whole town flocks to the enchanted spot. The rope-walker performs with thrilling skill. He walks on the rope, now barefooted, now with a new pair of shoes on his feet, again with cakes of soap tied to the soles of his shoes, while his companion on the ground sings his praises. The town pays him a fee out of the tax-money.

The coming to town of the man with the

bear and the monkey is also most exciting. The owner of the animals beats upon his tambourine, and we run to him. He sings songs which make the animals do amusing things. But the climax of the bear-and-monkey entertainment is reached when a strong man offers to wrestle with the bear.

The man comes forward. The bear, urged by his owner, stands on his hind legs. The wild and the human beast come together. The man's arms encircle the bear. The owner must see to it that the bear does not bite the man. The battle is joined. The bear grunts and snorts; the man does no less. The crowd is greatly excited. The owner urges his bear; the crowd urges the man. Such a battle cannot last long. The bear grows weaker, because he had danced before the fight. The crowd shouts. The man grips the ground with his feet and, with a last mighty push, lands upon the roaring animal. Men rush forward, rescue the man from the angry bear, and proclaim him hero.[1]

[1] Taken from my book, *A Far Journey*, chap. II, in which also see account of the wedding feast.

Is it not possible that the boys and girls of Nazareth of old did witness such a performance in the market-place of their town?

The wedding feast is also a great entertainment for the children in Syria. As a rule the whole town, and often people from other towns, are invited to the wedding. At this great feast the children are thrilled at the sight of dancers, sword-players, and a great number of men chanting songs together at the top of their voices. Also the youngsters are generously treated to sugar plums, hazelnuts, roasted chick-peas, and other sweets and confections.

Playing "wedding" and, much less frequently, "funeral," is a children's game in Syria. It was such great fun for us to plan this amusement. The boys would dress up the "bridegroom," the girls, the "bride." A boy and a girl would go about in the crowd "inviting the town" to the wedding. Then we would imitate our elders also by making as much noise as possible, and by having a "feast." The play "funeral" was rarely done,

because as a rule no mother wanted her child to represent the dead.

Jesus refers to this custom where he said, "Whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the market-place, who call unto their fellows and say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not mourn." [1] I have no doubt the Master played this game when he was a boy, for, remember, he was a real boy. He also kept up his habit of going to weddings as a man. Saint John's Gospel tells us at the beginning of the second chapter, "And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and Jesus also was bidden [invited] and his disciples, to the marriage."

One of the children's amusements in Syria, which is very ancient, is playing with little birds. This sounds rather cruel, and no doubt it is. But in Syria the children are not taught, as in this country, to be very gentle to birds and animals. The little birds are

[1] Matt. xi, 16.

caught with bird-lime. This is a sticky substance with which thin and flexible twigs, about two feet long, are covered. These twigs are placed in fig trees and other trees into which the birds come to feed or to "shade themselves" in the summer. Those which alight on the sticky twigs get caught. The children tie a string to one of the bird's legs and play with him. This custom existed in the East even before Jesus' time. Job refers to it where he speaks of the great sea monster, leviathan. "Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens?" [1]

I will mention two more games. The first is the game called "heel-bones" (*ke'ab*). This bone is found in the second joint of the sheep's leg, which corresponds to the human ankle, and resembles the capital H. In the grown sheep it measures about an inch and a half in length, about an inch in width, and is about three quarters of an inch at its thickest point. As the chief article of meat in Syria is

[1] Job xli. 5.

mutton, these bones are easily obtained by the children.

The most general way in which this game is played is this: A circle about five feet in diameter is marked on the ground. At the center a row of "heel-bones," one or two from each one of the players, is placed. The biggest and most perfect bones are reserved by the boys for "striking." These the players first toss in the air. The boy whose "bone" falls on its edge, with a certain side up, begins the game. He stands at a certain distance from the circle and, holding the bone between the thumb and the forefinger, flings it with considerable force and skill at the row of bones at the center of the circle. The bone which he drives outside the circle he wins. He continues playing until he "misses," when another boy proceeds to play, and so on.

The second game is "sticks" or "pegs." The sticks measure about eighteen inches in length, about an inch in thickness, and are sharpened at one end. The game is played in soft ground. The first player drives his peg

into the ground by a vigorous throw. The object then of the following player is to throw his peg in such a way as to dislodge the peg of his opponent and make his own stick in about the same place. The pegs each player dislodges he wins.

The Syrian boys also play such universally known games as hide-and-seek, marbles, see-saw, and leap-frog.

While many of these games are not mentioned in the Bible, some of them are very ancient. I feel certain that in ancient Israel and in Jesus' time the boys and girls played at such games with great rejoicing. Jesus himself, who lived cheerfully the life of our humanity, must have shared those boyish pleasures. He lived our own life at its best, and, when "his time came," he revealed God's love to the world and became the Master of us all.

CHAPTER VII

JESUS ON A PILGRIMAGE

In the preceding chapter I said that the only incident which the Gospel record gives us of Jesus' boyhood is his going with his parents on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem when he was twelve years old. Annual pilgrimages to the great holy places are still very common in Syria. The Mohammedans go to Mecca, the Christians and the Jews to Jerusalem.

In the second chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel the forty-first verse, it is said: "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had

fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him."

In Syria male children are taken on a pilgrimage or *zeara*, and thus permitted to receive the blessing which this religious act is supposed to bring upon them, as soon as they are able to make the journey. Full maturity is no essential condition. I went with my parents on two *zearas* before I was fifteen. At the present time there is no definite rule, at least among Christians, as to how many days should be spent at a sanctuary. Pilgrims usually "vow" to stay a certain number of days. In ancient Judaism, "the feast of the passover" occupied eight days, and it was that number of days which Mary and Joseph "fulfilled."

According to Saint Luke, on their return

journey to Nazareth Jesus' parents went a day's journey before they discovered that he was not with them. This phase of the story seems to have greatly puzzled the good old commentator, Adam Clarke. "Knowing what a treasure they possessed," he observes, "how could they be so long without looking on it? Where were the bowels and tender solicitude of the mother? Let them answer this question who can."

Clarke did not need to be so perplexed or so mystified. For one who knows the customs of the Syrians while on religious pilgrimages knows also that the experience of the "holy family" was not at all a strange one. The whole mystery is cleared up in the saying, "And they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." Kinsfolk and acquaintances travel in large groups, and the young pilgrims, such as the twelve-year-old Jesus, are considered safe so long as they keep in close touch with the company. On such journeys, parents may not see their sons for hours at a time. The friendly character of the

group, and the sense of security which faith gives, especially at such times, present no occasion for anxiety concerning the dear ones.

The saying that Joseph and Mary "went a day's journey" before they discovered that Jesus was not in the company must, it seems to me, include also the time consumed in their return journey to Jerusalem to seek their son. Perhaps they discovered his absence about noontime, when the company halted by a spring of water to partake of the *zad* (food for the way). At such a time families gather together to break bread. And what I feel certain of also is that the boy Jesus must have been with his parents when they first set out on their homeward journey early in the morning from Jerusalem, and that he detached himself from his kinsfolk and returned to the holy city shortly after the company had left that place. No Syrian family ever would start out on a journey before every one of its members had been accounted for. The Gospel writer's omission of these details is easily understood. His purpose was not to

give a photographic account of all that happened on the way. It was rather to reveal the deep spiritual desire which led the boy Jesus to return to the temple, where he was found by his anxious parents "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions."

In this brief but significant record of all the filial graces which Jesus must have possessed one only is mentioned in the second chapter of the Gospel by Saint Luke, where it is stated that he went to Nazareth with his parents "and was subject unto them."

This seemingly chance remark is full of significance. With us in Syria, *ta'at-el-walideen* (obedience to parents) has always been youth's crowning virtue. Individual initiative must not overstep the boundary line of this grace. Only in this way the organization of the family can be kept intact. In my boyhood days in that romantic country, whenever my father took me with him on a "visit of homage" to one of the lords of the land, the most fitting thing such a

dignitary could do to me was to place his hand upon my head and say with very dignified kindness, "Bright boy, and no doubt obedient to your parents."

As regards the grace of obedience to parents, I am not aware of a very great difference between the East and the West. But there is a difference. To an Oriental who has just come to this country, the American youth seem to be indifferent to this obedience. But to those of us sons of the East who have real knowledge of the American family, its unity does not seem to be so alarmingly weak. The mad rush for "business success" is, indeed, a menace to the American home, but love and obedience are still vital forces in that home. The terms "father," "mother," "brother," and "sister" have by no means lost their spiritual charms in American society. The deep affection in which the members of the better American family hold one another and the exquisite regard they have for one another command profound respect.

But the vital difference between the East

and the West is that to Easterners filial obedience is more than a social grace and an evidence of natural affection. It is a *religious* duty of far-reaching significance. God commands it. "Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother" is a divine command. The "displeasure" of a parent is as much to be feared as the wrath of God. This thought runs through Syrian society from the highest to the lowest of its ranks.

The explanation of the origin of sin in the third chapter of Genesis touches the very heart of this matter. The writer ascribes the "fall of man," not to any act which was in itself really harmful, but to disobedience. Adam was commanded by his divine parent not to eat of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil"; but he did eat, and consequently became a stranger to the blessings of his original home.

This idea of filial obedience has been at once the strength and the weakness of Orientals. In the absence of other rules to govern the family, this idea has preserved the unity of

the home and encouraged good behavior on the part of the children toward their parents. On the other hand, it has made the obedience of sons and daughters in many respects slavish. As a result it has hindered progress by making the life of the children a repetition of the life of their parents. The better results of the world's experiences teach that the children, who endeavor to live a more enlightened life than their parents could live, honor them more than those who stand still and live only by and on the things they inherited from the past.

It was, indeed, a great blessing to the world when Jesus broke away from mere formal obedience to parents, in the Oriental sense of the word, and declared, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

CHAPTER VIII

FEAST AND SACRAMENT

In this and the chapter which is to follow I shall sketch the closing scenes in Jesus' personal life. After that we shall follow his story as an Oriental teacher.

The events of the "upper room" on Mount Zion, and of the Garden of Gethsemane, are faithful pictures of striking phases of Syrian life. The last meal Jesus ate with his disciples is known to the Christian Church as "the Last Supper," or "the Lord's Supper." It was a true love-feast, such as Syrian friends eat, especially in the shadow of an approaching danger. It has been called "the Lord's Supper" because the Master blessed it and

gave it that touch of love and sadness which has made it a blessing through the ages.

However, whether as regards the table manners or the affectionate conversation between Jesus and his twelve friends, I find nothing in this little feast which is not in perfect harmony with what takes place on such occasions in my native land. The sacredness of the Last Supper is one of the great examples of how Jesus' life and words sanctified the commonest things of life. He was no inventor of new things, but a discoverer of the spiritual richness of things known to men to be ordinary.

The informal formalities of Oriental life are brimful of sentiment. The Oriental's chief concern in matters of conduct is not the correctness of the method, but the cordiality of the deed. To the Anglo-Saxon the Oriental appears to be perhaps too cordial and too sociable. To the Oriental, on the other hand, the Anglo-Saxon seems in danger of becoming very unsociable.

Be that as it may, the Oriental is never

afraid to "let himself go" and to give free course to his feelings. The Bible in general and such portions of it as the story of the Last Supper in particular illustrate this phase of Oriental life.

In Syria, as a general rule, the men eat their fraternal feasts alone, as in the case of the Master and his disciples at the Last Supper, when, so far as the record goes, none of the women followers of Christ were present. They sit on the floor in something like a circle, and eat out of one or a few large, deep dishes. The food is lifted into the mouth, not with a fork or spoon, — except in the case of liquid food, — but with small "shreds" of thin bread. Even liquid food is sometimes "dipped up" with pieces of bread formed like the bowl of a spoon. Here may be readily understood Jesus' saying, "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me." [1]

The great painting, "The Lord's Supper," a copy of which is found in almost every

[1] Matt. xxvi, 23.

Sunday-school room, presents an Oriental event in an Occidental form. The high table, the chairs, the individual plates and drinking glasses are European rather than Syrian appointments. The picture was not intended to be an historical, but a character, study. Such a task could not have been accomplished if the artist had presented the Master and his disciples as they really sat in the "upper room" — in a circle. He seats them on one side of the table, and divides them into four groups of three each — two groups on each side of the Master. As we view the great painting, we feel the thrill of horror which agitated the loyal disciples when Jesus declared, "Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." [1] The gestures, the sudden change of position, and the facial expression reveal the innermost soul of each disciple. This is the chief purpose of the picture. The artist gave the event a European rather than an Oriental setting, in order to make it more intelligible to the people for whom it was intended.

[1] Matt. xxvi, 21.

But the appointments of the Great Supper were truly Oriental. The Master and his disciples sat on the floor and ate out of one or a few large, deep dishes. In Saint Mark's account of that event[1] we read: "And when it was evening he cometh with the twelve. And as they sat and were eating, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you shall betray me, even he that *eateth* with me." The fact that they were *all* eating with him is shown in the statement, "They began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him, Is it I? And he said unto them, It is one of the twelve, he that dippeth with me in the dish."

The last phrase, "He that dippeth with me in the dish," has been construed to mean that it was Judas only (who was sitting near to Jesus) who was dipping in the dish out of which the Master was eating. This is altogether possible, but by no means certain. The fact is that according to Syrian customs on such occasions each of the few large dishes contains a different kind of food. Each one of

[1] Revised Version, xiv, 17–20.

the guests is privileged to reach to any one of the dishes and dip his bread in it. From this it may be safely inferred that several or all of the disciples dipped *in turn* in the dish which was nearest to Jesus. The fact that the other disciples did not know whom their Master meant by his saying that one of them should betray him, even after he had said, "He that dippeth with me in the dish," shows plainly that Judas was eating in the same fashion as all the other disciples were.

Therefore the saying, "He that dippeth with me," etc., was that of disappointed love. It may be thus paraphrased: "I have loved you all alike. I have chosen you as my dearest friends. We have often broken bread and sorrowed and rejoiced together, yet one of you, my dear disciples, one who is now eating with me *as the rest are*, intends to betray me!"

And that forlorn but glorious company who met in the upper room on Mount Zion on that historic night had certainly one cup out of which they drank. At our feasts we always drank the wine out of one and the same cup.

We did not stay up nights thinking about microbes. To us the one cup meant fellowship and fraternal communion, and not drunkenness. The one who gives drink (*sacky*) fills the cup and passes it to the most honored member of the company first. He drinks the contents and returns the cup to the *sacky*, who fills it again and hands it to another member of the group, and so on, until all have been served. It is also customary for a gracious host to request as a happy ending to the feast that the contents of one cup be drunk by the whole company as a seal of their friendship with one another. Each guest takes a sip and passes the cup to the one next to him until all have partaken of the "fruit of the vine."

I have no doubt that it was after this custom that the disciples drank when Jesus "took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave to them: and they *all* drank of it." [1]

No account of fraternal feasting in Syria can be complete without mention of the *zĭk-*

[1] Mark xiv, 23.

reh (remembrance). To be remembered by his friends after his departure from them is one of the Syrian's deepest and dearest desires. The expressions "I remember," "remember me," "your remembrance," "the remembrance of those days," and like phrases are legion among the Syrians.

Rarely do friends who have been feasting together part without this request being made by those of them who do not expect to meet with their friends again for a time. "Remember me when you meet again," is said by the departing friend with unspeakable tenderness.

This affectionate request, "remember me," signifies, "I love you, therefore I am always with you." If we love one another, we cannot be separated from one another. The *zĭkreh* is the bond of fraternity between us.

Was not this the very thing which the Master meant when he said, "This do in remembrance of me"? [1] The disciples were asked never to allow themselves to forget their Master's love for them and for the world:

[1] Luke xxii, 19.

never to forget that if his love lived in their hearts he was always with them, present at their feasts, and in their struggles in the world to lead the world from darkness into light. "This do in remembrance of me," is therefore the equivalent of "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." [1]

At the Last Supper, we are told, John, the "beloved disciple," was leaning on Jesus' bosom.[2] This practice of a man leaning on the bosom of another on a social occasion like the one before us is considered objectionable in American society. It is, however, in perfect harmony with Syrian customs. How often have I seen men friends in such an attitude. There is not in it the slightest disregard of the rules of propriety; the act was as natural to us all as shaking hands. The practice is especially indulged in when intimate friends are about to part from one another, as on the eve of a journey, or when about to face a dangerous situation. They then sit with their heads leaning against each other, or the one's

[1] Matt. xxviii, 20. [2] John xiii, 23.

head resting upon the other's shoulder or breast.

They talk to one another in most affectionate terms. The expressions, "My brother," "My eyes," "My soul," "My heart," and the like, make up the conversation. "My life, my blood are for you; take the very sight of my eyes, if you will!" And lookers-on say admiringly, "Behold, how they love one another!"

Was it, therefore, strange that the Master, who knew the deepest secret of the divine life, and whose whole life was a living sacrifice, should say to his intimate friends, as he handed them the bread and the cup on that great night, "Take, eat; this is my body"; and "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood"? Here again Jesus charged the ordinary words of friendly intercourse with rare spiritual richness and made the common speech of his people express eternal realities.

The treachery of Judas is no more an Oriental than it is a human weakness. Trai-

tors can claim neither racial or national refuge. They are fugitives in the earth. But in the Judas episode is involved one of the most tender, most touching acts of Jesus' whole life. To one familiar with the customs of the East, Jesus' handing the "sop" to his betrayer was an act of great beauty and significance.

"And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon." [1] At Syrian feasts, especially in the region where Jesus lived, such sops are handed to those who stand and serve the guests. But in a more significant manner those morsels are exchanged by friends. Choice bits of food are handed to friends by one another, as signs of close intimacy. It is never expected that any person will hand such a sop to one whom he does not consider to be his friend.

I can never think of this act in the Master's story without thinking of "the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." To the one who carried in his mind and heart such a terrible

[1] John xiii, 26.

plot against the loving Master, Jesus handed the sop of friendship, the morsel which is never offered to an enemy. The rendering of the act in words is this: "Judas, my disciple, I have infinite pity for you. You have proved false, you have forsaken me in your heart; but I will not treat you as an enemy, for I have come, not to destroy, but to fulfill. Here is my sop of friendship, and 'that thou doest, do quickly.'"

Apparently Jesus' manner was so cordial and sympathetic that, as the Gospel tells us, "Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor." [1]

Thus in this simple act of the Master, we have perhaps the finest practical example of "Love your enemies" in the entire Gospel.

Is it, therefore, to be wondered at that in

[1] John xiii, 28, 29.

speaking of Judas, the writer of Saint John's Gospel says, "And after the sop Satan entered into him"? For how can one who is a traitor at heart reach for the gift of true friendship without being transformed into the very spirit of treason?

Again, Judas's treasonable kissing of Jesus in Gethsemane was a willful misuse of an ancient, universal, and deeply loved Syrian custom. In saluting one another, especially after having been separated for a time, men friends of the same social rank kiss one another on both cheeks, sometimes with very noisy profusion. When they are not of the same social rank, the inferior kisses the hand of the superior, while the latter at least pretends to kiss his dutiful friend upon the cheek. So David and Jonathan "kissed one another, until David exceeded." As a child I always felt a deep regard for that outpouring of affection, when strong men "fell upon one another's neck" and kissed, while the women's eyes swam in tears of joy. The passionate, quick, and rhythmic exchange of affectionate

words of salutation and kisses sounded, with perhaps a little less harmony, like an intermingling of vocal and instrumental music.

So Judas, when "forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Master, and kissed him," [1] invented no new sign by which to point Jesus out to the Roman soldiers, but employed an old custom for the completion of an evil design. Just as Jesus glorified the common customs of his people by using them as instruments of love, so Judas degraded those very customs by wielding them as weapons of hate.

[1] Matt. xxvi, 49.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST SCENE

PERHAPS nowhere else in the New Testament do the essential traits of the Oriental nature find so clear an expression as in this closing scene of the Master's life. The Oriental's *dependence*, to which the world owes the greatest and tenderest Scriptural passages, finds here its most glorious manifestations.

As I have already said, the Oriental is never afraid to "let himself go," whether in joy or sorrow, and to give vent to his emotions. It is of the nature of the Anglo-Saxon to suffer in silence. He faces danger and sorrow, with hardly a word of complaint upon his lips or a ripple of excitement on his face. He dislikes

asking for sympathy. He likes to be his own master and feels convinced that he is "able to take care of himself." During my early years in this country the reserve of Americans in times of sorrow and danger, as well as in times of joy, was to me amazing. Not being as yet aware of their inward fire and intensity of feeling, which they held in check, I felt inclined to doubt whether they had any emotions to speak of. For good or evil, the Oriental is first of all a man who craves sympathy. He yearns openly and noisily for companionship, and seeks help and support outside himself. Whatever disadvantages this trait may have, it has been the one supreme qualification that has made the Oriental the religious teacher of the whole world. It was his childlike dependence on God that gave birth to the twenty-third and fifty-first Psalms, and made the Lord's Prayer the universal petition of Christendom. It was also this dependence on companionship, human and divine, which inspired the great commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord

thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself."

Now it is in the light of this idea that we must view Christ's utterances at the Last Supper and in Gethsemane. The record tells us that while at the Supper he said to his disciples, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer," [1] — or, "I have heartily desired," and so forth, which brings it nearer the original text. Again, "He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." "This is my body . . . This is my blood . . . Do this in remembrance of me." We must seek the proper setting for these utterances, not merely in the upper room in Zion, but in the deepest tendencies of the Oriental mind.

And the climax is reached in the dark hour of Gethsemane, in the hour of intense suffering, and final triumph in Jesus' surrender to the Father's will. How true to that demonstrative Oriental nature is the Scriptural rec-

[1] Luke xxii, 15.

ord, "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." [1]

No less touching than Jesus' experience itself is the simple, childlike way in which it was written. The Gospel writer did not go out of his way to disguise the sorrows and pains of his master. It is very likely that if Jesus had been an Anglo-Saxon he would not have shown his sorrow so clearly as he did in the Garden of Gethsemane. If he had, it is probable that an Anglo-Saxon writer in describing the scene would have thought it rather undignified to say that the Master's sweat was "as it were great drops of blood." He would have said that the Great Teacher was "visibly affected."

The darkness deepened and the Master "took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me." [2] Three times

[1] Luke xxii, 44. [2] Matt. xxvi, 37–38.

did the Great Teacher utter that matchless prayer, whose spirit of fear as well as of trust makes real the doctrine of the humanity of God and the divinity of man as exemplified in the person of Christ: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt!" [1]

In the West, especially among the English speaking peoples, it is considered a weakness in a man to sorrow so deeply. A woman might cry and ask for comfort, but a man must not. But my knowledge of the Oriental mind permits me to say positively that such experiences as Jesus had in Gethsemane do not mean weakness. Strong men show their feelings in this manner because they know that God and their earthly friends love them. So love and sympathy break forth in times of need like streams and bring friends closer together.

The simple fact is that while in Gethsemane, as indeed everywhere else throughout his ministry, Jesus was not in the position of one

[1] Matt. xxvi, 39.

trying to "play the hero." His companions were his intimate earthly friends and his gracious heavenly Father, and to them he spoke as an Oriental would speak to those dear to him. He spoke *just as he felt*, with not a shadow of show or sham. His words were not those of weakness and despair, but of confidence and affection. The love of his friends and the love of his Father in heaven were his to draw upon in his hour of trial, with not the slightest artificial reserve. How much better and happier this world would be if we all dealt with one another and with God in the warm, simple, and pure love of Christ!

As the life and words of Christ amply testify, the mission of the Oriental has been to teach mankind not science, logic, or law, but a simple, loving, childlike faith in God. Therefore, before we can fully know our Master as the world Christ, we must first know him as the Syrian Christ.

CHAPTER X

THE ORIENTAL MANNER OF SPEECH

BEFORE we can fully understand Jesus' sayings, as well as many other passages in the Bible, it is necessary for us to know the Oriental manner of speech. By this I do not mean that without this knowledge no one can find the spiritual truths of the Bible. The true seeker after those great truths can find them in the Bible and be helped by them in any language and anywhere in the world.

But what I do mean is that to the Christian world Jesus is not only a teacher. He is a spiritual authority. To his followers his word is law. Church doctrines are supposed to be built on his and other Bible sayings. The

meanings of such sayings are not always so plain and simple that all can understand them alike. Therefore, those sayings need to be explained or interpreted to many. And it is here where knowledge of the Oriental manner of speech becomes necessary. Jesus was an Oriental teacher and the Orientals express their thoughts in a different way from that of the Occidentals.

As a result, Western readers of the Bible, who do not know this difference, are very likely to give to some of Jesus' sayings meanings which do not really belong to them. They are likely to ascribe to Jesus authority where he never intended to establish it. This thing has happened and has caused divisions and quarrels among Christians.

For an example, take the passage in Saint Luke's Gospel, the fourteenth chapter and twenty-sixth verse: "If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Now, did Jesus come to teach us to

hate the members of our own families and our own lives? Positively no! His Gospel is a message of love, not only toward one's friends, but toward even one's enemies. Would he teach us to hate the children while he himself took them up in his arms and said "of such is the kingdom of heaven"? Yet I have argued with persons in this country who asserted that Jesus did teach hatred for one's family, because he *said so.*

Now, this is a very important matter. For if Jesus did mean that, then it becomes the duty of a Christian, if he differs in opinion with members of his own family, to hate them. And it is in such cases where knowledge of the Oriental manner of speech is very necessary. A Western teacher would express the same thought in different words. For what did Jesus mean? He meant that in spiritual matters one is not obliged to be bound forever by the opinions of his family. He might very properly differ from them, even live apart from them as a grown person. This, of course, does not mean hating them.

But why did Jesus use the word "hate." Simply because the Orientals are not so moderate in their speech as the Occidentals are. They like to use strong words in order to impress the hearer. That is their way, and they understand one another. No Syrian Christian would take this passage literally and as a result hate his family. Jesus meant that when one comes to follow him and seek the kingdom of heaven with him, if the family of such a person differed from him and sought to hinder him from following Christ, he should disregard their opinions.

From the foregoing it may be seen that our purpose in the following chapters is to show how certain Bible passages should be understood. Our purpose is to make a brief survey of Oriental daily language, which is the same to-day as it was in Bible times, in order better to understand the Syrian Christ.

From the remote past, even to this day, the Oriental's manner of speech has been that of a worshiper, and not that of a business man or an industrial worker in the modern Western

sense. To the Syrian of to-day, as to his ancient ancestors, life, with all its activities and cares, revolves around a religious center. This does not mean that the Easterner has always been able to live up to the purest teachings of his religion. It does, however, mean that this man, calm or disturbed, at work or at play, has never failed to believe that he is overshadowed by the All-seeing God. He has never ceased to cry: "O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it!" [1]

And it is one of the grandest, most significant facts in human history that, notwithstanding his defects and fears, because he has maintained the altar of God as life's center, the Oriental has been the channel of the noblest spiritual revelation in the possession of man.

[1] Ps. cxxxix, 1–6.

When the depths of human nature are thoroughly saturated with the thought of God, then it is prepared both to receive and to give those thoughts of which scriptures are made. Industry and commerce have their good uses. But an industrial and commercialistic atmosphere is not conducive to the production of sacred books. Where the chief interests of life center in external things, religion is bound to become only one and perhaps a minor concern in life.

The Oriental has always lived in a world of spiritual mysteries. Fearful or confident, to him God has been all and in all. "The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. In keeping of them there is great reward." [1] The son of the East has been richly rewarded. He is the religious teacher of all mankind. Through him all scriptures have come into being. All the great, living religions of the world originated in Asia; and the three greatest of them — Judaism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism — have come

[1] Ps. xix, 9, 11.

into the world through the Semitic race in that little country called Syria. The constant desire of the Oriental for spiritual dreams and visions has had its rewards. He sowed bountifully, he reaped bountifully.

Note the Syrian's daily language: it is essentially Biblical. He has no *secular* language. The only real break between his scriptures and the vocabulary of his daily life is that which exists between the classical and the common language. When you ask a Syrian about his business he will not answer, "We are doing well at present," but "*Allah mûn 'aim*" (God is giving bounteously). To one starting on a journey the phrase is not "Take good care of yourself," but "Go, in the keeping and protection of God." By example and precept we were trained from infancy in this manner of speech. Coming into a house, the visitor salutes by saying, "God grant you good morning," or "The peace of God come upon you." So it is written in the tenth chapter of Matthew, "and as ye enter into the house, salute it. And if the

house be worthy, let your peace come upon it; but if it be not worthy, let your peace return unto you."

In saluting a day laborer at work we said, "*Allah yaatik-el-afie*" (God give you health and strength). In saluting reapers in the field, or "gatherers of the increase" in the vineyards or olive groves, we said just the words of Boaz, in the second chapter of the Book of Ruth, when he "came from Bethlehem and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee." Or another Scriptural expression, now more extensively used on such occasions, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you!"

In asking a shepherd about his flock we said, "How are the blessed ones?" or a parent about his children, "How are the preserved ones?" They are preserved of God through their "angels," of whom the Master spoke when he said, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the

face of my Father." [1] Speaking of a good man we said, "The grace of God is poured upon his face." So in the Book of Proverbs,[2] "Blessings are upon the head of the just."

Similar to the foregoing are such expressions as these. In trying to rise from a sitting posture (the Syrians sit on the floor with their legs folded under them), a person, using the right arm for leverage, says, as he springs up, "*Ya Allah*" (O God [help]). In inquiring about the nature of an object, he says, "*Sho dinû?*" (What is its religion?) And one of the queerest expressions, when translated into English, is that employed to indicate that a kettleful of water, for example, has boiled beyond the required degree: "This water has turned to be an infidel" (*kaffer*). It may be noticed here that it is not the old theology only which associates the infidel with intense heat.

So this religious language is the Oriental's daily speech. I have stated in my autobiography that the men my father employed in

[1] Matt. xviii, 10. [2] x, 6.

his building operations were grouped according to their faith. He had so many Druses, so many Greek Orthodox, Maronites, and so forth.

In this country religious language is not used in business and social intercourse. In my judgment, the superior culture of the West, instead of limiting the vocabulary of religion to the one hour of formal worship on Sunday, and entirely disregarding it during the remainder of the week, should make a very general use of it, and on a much higher plane than the Orient has yet discovered.

CHAPTER XI

LOVE OF ENEMIES

Is it possible for one to love his enemies? I do not know how many of my young readers will say "yes," and how many will say "no." The question is no easy one. Before we undertake to discuss it let us quote the Master's words on the subject.

"Ye have heard," said he to his followers, "that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven." [1]

[1] Matt. v, 43–45.

Here we have the very heart and soul of the Gospel and of Jesus' ministry of reconciliation. Yet to many good Christians, as well as to unfriendly critics of the New Testament, the command, "Love your enemies," offers a serious difficulty. Is not love of enemies beyond the power of human nature?

This question is very proper. And it is an obvious fact that we cannot love by command; we cannot love to order. This mysterious flow of soul which we call love is not of our own making; therefore we cannot *will* to love. In this case, however, an explanation of the use by the Orientals of the word "love" will throw some light on this great commandment.

The word "love" has been more highly specialized in the West than in the East. In its proper English use it means only that ardent, affectionate feeling which cannot be created by will and design. In the West the word "love" is not used for expressing the less ardent desires such as the terms "to like," "to have good-will toward," and "to be well-disposed toward" imply.

Not so in the East. The word "like," meaning "to be favorably inclined toward," is not found in the Bible. In the English version it is used in two places, but the translation is incorrect. In the twenty-fifth chapter of Deuteronomy the seventh verse, "If the man like not to take his brother's wife," should be rendered, "If the man *consent* not"; and in the fourth chapter of Amos, the fifth verse, "For this liketh you, O ye children of Israel," is in the original, "For this ye *loved*, O ye children of Israel."

So to us Orientals the only word which can express any cordial inclination of approval is "love." One loves his wife and children, and loves grapes and figs and meat, if he likes these things. An employer says to an employee, "If you *love* to work for me according to this agreement, you can." It is nothing uncommon for one to say to a chance acquaintance whom he likes, "I must say, *Sahib* [friend], that I love you!" I know of no equivalent in Eastern speech for the phrase, "I am interested in you." "Love" and

"hate" are the usual terms by which to express approval and disapproval, as well as real love and hatred.

The scriptural passages illustrative of this thought are not a few. In the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the thirteenth verse, it is said, "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." God does not "hate." The two terms here, "loved" and "hated," mean "approved" and "disapproved." It is as a father approves of the conduct of one of his children and disapproves that of another of them. Another example of this use of the word "hate" has already been given in the preceding chapter, in the passage which speaks of one's hating the members of his own family.

Another scriptural passage which illustrates the free use of the word "love" is the story of the rich man in the tenth chapter of Saint Mark's Gospel. Beginning with the seventeenth verse, the passage reads: "And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeling to him, and

asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. *Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him*, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest"; and so forth. Apparently the brief conversation with the young man showed Jesus that his questioner was both polite and intelligent, so the Master *liked* him. Stating the case in Western phraseology it may be said that the young Hebrew seeker was an agreeable or likable man.

Quite different is the import of the word "love" in such of the Master's sayings as are found in the fifteenth chapter of Saint John's Gospel: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. This is my commandment, That ye love one

another, as I have loved you." Here the term "love" is used in its truest and purest sense.

From all this it may be seen that when the Great Oriental Teacher said to his countrymen, who considered all other clans than their own as their enemies, "Love your enemies," he did not mean that they should love them as one loves his mother. He meant that they should have good will toward them. We cannot love by will and design, but we certainly can will to be well disposed even toward those who, we believe, have ill will toward us. So whether we use the word in the Eastern or the Western sense, Love is "the greatest thing in the world."

There are in the world two forces at work, love and hatred. Hatred destroys, love builds; hatred injures, love heals; hatred embitters life, love sweetens it; hatred is godlessness, love is godliness; hatred makes enemies, love makes friends. The real question, therefore, is, not as to whether there are unlovable persons in the world or not, but rather,

which one of these two forces would you have to rule your own life and the life of humanity at large, love or hatred? Which nutrition would you give your own soul and the souls of those who are near and dear to you, that of hatred, or that of love? Can it be your aim in life to aid that power which injures, destroys, embitters life and estranges from God, or the power which heals, builds up, sweetens life, and makes one with God?

This, therefore, is the Master's law of love: Give your life and service to that power which deserves your respect and awakens your purest affections, regardless of the "evil and the undeserving." Recognize no enemies, and you shall have none. The only power which can defeat the designs of hatred is love. The foams of hatred and fumes of vengeance are bound to pass away with all their possessors; only love is permanent and sovereign good.

CHAPTER XII

THE "UNTRUTHFUL" ORIENTAL

Because of his partial disregard for accuracy in stating things, the Oriental has been considered to be untruthful. It is often said, "You cannot believe what an Oriental says." "Whatever an Oriental may say, the opposite is likely to be the truth," and so forth.

I do not wish in the least to undertake to excuse the Oriental's untruthfulness, any more than to approve of the untruthfulness of American politicians during a political campaign. I have no doubt that the Oriental suffers more from the universal affliction of untruthfulness than does the Anglo-Saxon, and that he sorely needs to train his mind to

have more respect for facts. Nevertheless, I feel compelled to say that a clear understanding of some of the Oriental's ways of thinking will do away with many of the accusations against his veracity. His ways will remain different from the ways of the Anglo-Saxon, and perhaps not wholly agreeable to the latter; but the son of the East — the dreamer and writer of scriptures — will be credited with more honesty of purpose.

It is unpleasant to an Anglo-Saxon to note how many things an Oriental says, but does not mean. And it is distressing to an Oriental to note how many things the Anglo-Saxon means, but does not say. To a Syrian the brevity, yea, even curtness, of an Englishman or an American, seems to rob life of its pleasures and to place too high a value on time. For the Oriental, the chief value of time must not be considered in terms of business and money, but in terms of sociability and good fellowship. Poetry, and not prosaic accuracy, must be the principal feature of speech.

The fact is that the Oriental's real trouble

here is not always his intention to deceive. It is rather his *ma besay-il* — it does not matter. He sees no essential difference between nine o'clock and half after nine, or whether a conversation took place on the housetop or in the house. The main thing is to know the substance of what happened, with as many of the supporting details as may be conveniently remembered. A case may be overstated or understated, not necessarily for the purpose of deceiving, but to impress the hearer with the significance or the insignificance of it. If a sleeper who had been expected to rise at sunrise should oversleep and need to be awakened, say half an hour or an hour later than the appointed time, he is then aroused with the call, "Arise, it is noon already — *qûm sar edh-hir.*" Of a strong and brave man it is said, "He can split the earth — *yekkid elaridh.*" The Syrians suffer from no misunderstanding in such cases. They *discern* one another's meaning.

Now it may easily be seen why Western readers of the Bible, especially those who take

all its sayings literally, often find it difficult to understand the exact meanings of those sayings. Let us take a simple example.

In the first chapter of Saint Mark's Gospel, the thirty-second and thirty-third verses, it is said, "And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And *all the city* was gathered together at the door." The swiftness with which the poor people in Eastern communities bring their sick to a healer, be he a prophet or only a physician, is proverbial. Because of the scarcity of physicians, as well as of money with which to pay for medical attendance, when a healer is called to a home many sick persons come or are brought to him. The peoples of the East have always believed also in the healing of diseases by religious means. When a prophet arises the first thing expected of him is that he should heal the sick.

Note the account of this incident. The place was the city of Capernaum, and we are told that "*all the city* was gathered together

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at the door" of the house where Jesus was bestowing the loving, healing touch upon the sick. Was the *whole city* at the door? Were *all* the sick in that large city brought into that house for Jesus to heal them? Here we are confronted by a physical impossibility. An Anglo-Saxon writer would have said, "Quite a number gathered at the door," which in all probability would have been a *correct* report.

But to the Oriental writer the object of the report was not *to determine the number* of those who stood outside, nor to insist that each and every sick person in Capernaum was brought into the humble home of Simon and Andrew. It was rather to glorify the Great Teacher and his divine work of mercy. The saying, "Quite a number gathered at the door," may be correct, but to an Oriental it is absolutely colorless and tasteless; it indicates a very limited use of the imagination.

Take another scriptural passage. In the seventeenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, the first verse, we read: "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John

his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them; and his face did shine as the sun."

"After six days" from what time? Well, what does it matter from what time? Do you not see that the object of the record is to give a glimpse of what happened on that "high mountain" where the light and glory of the unseen world were reflected in the face of the Christ? To know this is to be reconciled to many other seemingly incomplete statements in the New Testament and to many rather abrupt beginnings and endings of stories. So far as spiritual values are concerned such omissions are of no real importance.

But let us pursue this topic a little farther. A Syrian's chief purpose in a conversation is to convey an impression by whatever suitable means, and not to deliver his message in scientifically accurate terms. He expects to be judged not by what he *says*, but by what he *means*. He does not expect his hearer to listen to him like a "cool-headed Yankee," and to interrupt the flow of conversation by

saying, with the least possible show of emotion, "Do I understand you to say," etc. No; he piles up his metaphors and superlatives, reinforced by a theatrical display of gestures and facial expressions, in order to make the hearer *feel* his meaning.

The Oriental's speech is always "illustrated." He speaks as it were in pictures. With him the spoken language goes hand in hand with the more ancient gesture language. His profuse gesticulation is that phase of his life which first attracts the attention of Occidental travelers in the East. He points to almost everything he mentions in his speech, and would picture every feeling and emotion by means of some bodily movement. No sooner does he mention his eye than his index finger points to or even touches that organ. "Do you understand me?" is said to a listener with the speaker's finger on his own temple, as if pointing to his mind. In rebuking one who makes unreasonable demands upon him, a Syrian would be likely to stoop down and say, "Don't you want to ride on my back?"

One of the most striking examples of this manner of speech in the Bible is found in the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Acts. Beginning with the tenth verse, the writer says: "And as we tarried there [at Cæsarea] many days, there came down from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." Now an Occidental adviser would not have gone to all that trouble. He would have said to the great apostle, "Now you understand I don't mean to interfere with your business, but if I were you I wouldn't go down to Jerusalem. Those Jews there are not pleased with what you are doing, and would be likely to make things unpleasant for you." The Syrian adviser, in order to make his words effective, bound himself, just as he thought Saint Paul would be bound if he went down to Jerusalem.

Just as the Oriental loves to flavor his food strongly and to dress in bright colors, so is he fond of metaphor, exaggeration, and positiveness in speech. To him mild accuracy is weakness. A host of illustrations of this thought rise in my mind as I recall my early experiences as a Syrian youth. I remember how those jovial men who came to our house to "sit" — that is, to make a call of indefinite duration — would make their wild assertions and back them up by vows which they never intended to keep. The one would say, "What I say to you is the truth, and if it is not, I will cut off my right arm" — grasping it — "at the shoulder." "I promise you this" — whatever the promise might be — "and if I fail in fulfilling my promise I will pluck out my right eye."

To such speech we always listened admiringly and respectfully. But we never had the slightest idea that in any circumstances the speaker would carry out his resolution, or that his hearers had a right to demand it from him. He simply was in earnest; or as an

American would say, "He meant that he was right."

Such an Oriental mode of thought furnishes us with the background for Jesus' saying, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. If thy right hand offend thee, cut if off, and cast it from thee." [1]

To many Western Christians these sayings of Christ present very great difficulties. To such the question, "How can I be a true disciple of Christ, if I do not obey what he commands?" makes these misunderstood sayings of Christ great stumbling blocks. Some time ago a lady wrote me a letter saying that at a prayer-meeting which she attended, the minister, after reading the fifth chapter of Matthew, which contains these commands, said, "If we are true Christians we must not shrink from obeying these plain commands of our Lord."

My informant stated also that on hearing that, she asked the preacher, "Suppose the

[1] Matt. v, 29–30.

tongue should offend, and we should cut it off; should we be better Christians than if we did endeavor to atone for the offense in some other way?" The preacher, after a moment of perplexed silence, said, "If there is no one here who can answer this question, we will sing a hymn."

The best explanation of these sayings of Christ is given by Saint Paul in the sixth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. This is precisely what the Master meant: "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God." Cutting or mutilation of the body has nothing to do with either passage, nor indeed with the Christian life. The cutting off of an arm that steals is no sure guaranty of the removal of the desire to steal; nor would the plucking out of an eye do away with the bad desire which uses the eye for an instrument. Christ deals with the desires of our hearts.

Another saying of this kind is found in the fifth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, at the forty-second verse: "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." This verse reminds me of an American lawyer who had a grudge against the Bible. It seems to me that on every single occasion when he and I discussed the Scriptures together, or spoke of Christianity, I found him armed with this passage as his most effective weapon against the innocent Nazarene. "What was Jesus thinking of," he would say, "when he uttered these words? What would become of our business interests and financial institutions if we gave to every one that asked of us, and lent money without good security to every Tom, Dick, and Harry?"

Of course, the text needs to be explained. Jesus did not explain why he wanted his hearers to lend to their friends, because they knew why. They were acquainted with the following Old Testament saying which Jesus also had in mind: "And if thy brother be

waxen poor, and his hand fail with thee; then thou shalt uphold him: as a stranger and a sojourner shall he live with thee. Take thou no *interest* of him or increase, but fear thy God: that thy brother may live with thee. *Thou shalt not give him thy money upon interest,* nor give him thy victuals for increase." [1] According to this an Israelite could not lawfully charge a fellow Israelite interest on a loan. Therefore, "as a matter of business," the money-lenders preferred to lend their money to the Gentiles, from whom they were permitted to take interest, and to "turn away" from borrowers of their own race. And as the teachers of Israel of his day often blamed Jesus for his non-observance of the law, he in turn never failed to remind them of the fact that their own practices disobeyed the law more than his own liberal interpretation of it in the interest of man. So Jesus did not mean that we should lend money to "every Tom, Dick, and Harry," but that we should live up to the religion we profess and be good to our friends when they are in distress.

[1] Lev. xxv, 35; Revised Version.

While on a visit to Syria, after I had spent several years in this country, of course I went about visiting some of the friends of my youth. In welcoming me to his house, an old friend of mine spoke with impressive cheerfulness as follows: "You have extremely honored me by coming into my abode [*menzel*]. I am not worthy of it. This house is yours; you can burn it if you wish. My children also are at your disposal; I would sacrifice them all for your pleasure. What a blessed day this is, now that the light of your countenance has shone upon us"; and so on.

I understood my friend fully and very delightfully. But my American wife was greatly alarmed when I translated the words of welcome to her. "Is he really going to set the house on fire and sacrifice the children for our pleasure?" she inquired. "What does he mean?" "Don't be so frightened, dear," I replied; "he means that he is glad to see us."

I wish to give three more examples of Oriental speech from the Master's sayings before I bring this chapter to a close. First

his saying to the disciples, "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove." [1]

Could a Christian remove a mountain by simply having faith? This saying has puzzled many Christians, and has made some enemies of Christianity dare Christians to prove it by performing such an act.

To one well acquainted with the Oriental manner of speech this saying was not meant to fix a rule of conduct, but to glorify faith. In order to do this in real Syrian fashion, Jesus spoke of the smallest amount of faith as being capable of moving the biggest object on earth. His disciples must have understood him clearly, because we have no record that they ever tried to remove mountains by faith and prayer. It would be most astounding, indeed, if Christ really thought that those disciples, who forsook all and followed him, had not as much faith as a grain of mustard seed, and yet said to them, "Ye are the light of the world. Ye are the salt of the earth."

[1] Matt. xvii, 20.

Of a similar character is the Master's saying, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." [1] Judging by the large number of persons in this country who have asked my opinion, as a Syrian, concerning its correctness, and the fact that I have myself seen it in print, the following interpretation of this passage must have been much in vogue.

The walled cities of Palestine, the explanation runs, have large gates. Because of their great size, such gates are opened only on special occasions to admit chariots and caravans. Therefore, in order to give pedestrians thoroughfare, a smaller opening about the size of an ordinary door is made in the center of the great gate, near to the ground. Now this smaller door through which a camel cannot pass is the eye of the needle mentioned in the Gospel.

I once heard a Sunday-School superintendent explain this passage to his scholars by

[1] Matt. xix, 24.

saying that a camel could pass through this eye of a needle — meaning the door — if he was not loaded. Therefore, if we cast off our load of sin outside, we can easily enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Were the camel and the gate left out, this statement would be excellent fatherly advice. There is perhaps no gate in the heavenly city large enough to admit a man with a load of sin strapped to his soul. However, the chief trouble with these explanations of the "eye-of-the-needle" passage is that they are wholly untrue.

This saying is current in the East, and in all probability it was a common saying there long before the advent of Christ. But I never knew that small door in a city or a castle gate to be called the needle's eye; nor indeed the large gate to be called the needle. The name of that door, in the common speech of the country, is the "plum," and I am certain the scriptural passage makes no reference to it whatever.

The reference is to the sewing instrument,

and nothing else. The passage is one of the finest examples of Oriental positiveness and dazzling imagery. I can just hear the Master say it. Jesus' purpose was to state that it was extremely difficult "for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God." [1] To this end he chose the biggest animal and the smallest opening known to his people, and compared the impossibility of a camel passing through the eye of a needle with that of a man weighted down with earthly things becoming one with God.

The last and no less interesting example is found in the eighteenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, the twenty-first verse: "Then came Peter and said to him, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven." Did Jesus really mean that an offender should be forgiven four hundred and ninety times? Would it be to the interest of the offender

[1] Mark x, 24.

himself and to society at large to forgive a thief or a murderer four hundred and ninety times? Is not punishment which is guided by reason and sympathy, and whose end is corrective, really a great aid in character-building?

When Jesus saw the money-changers and others desecrating the temple, he did not forgive them seventy times seven. In the second chapter of Saint John's Gospel, the thirteenth verse, we are told: "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: *and when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple,* and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."

Did Jesus then contradict himself? I do not think so at all. He taught forgiveness always *so far as it was beneficial.* In this

case Peter chose the full and sacred number "seven" as a very liberal measure of forgiveness. Apparently Jesus' purpose was to make forgiveness a matter of disposition, sympathy, and good judgment, rather than of arithmetic. To this end he made use of an Oriental saying which meant *indefiniteness*, rather than a fixed rule. He as much as said to Peter: "Do not limit yourself. Have no fixed number. In some cases you may do good by forgiving many times, while in other cases it might be harmful to do so. Therefore have the spirit of forgiveness and exercise it wherever and whenever you find it will help those to whom it is applied."

From the foregoing it is not difficult to see that, once the reader of the Bible becomes acquainted with the manner of Oriental speech, he will escape many difficulties in understanding the great Book. He also will become more charitable toward Orientals and not condemn them as untruthful. He will learn also not to judge according to the letter, but according to the spirit. For "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."

CHAPTER XIII

SPEAKING IN PARABLES

Conversing and teaching by means of parable and story is a distinctly Eastern custom. One of the very important reasons for this is the *sociable* nature of such a method of teaching, which is so dear to the Syrian heart. In view of the small value the Orientals place upon time, the story-teller, the speaker in parables, is to them the most charming conversationalist. Why be so prosy, brief, and abstract? The spectacular charm and intense reality of the parable of the Prodigal Son is infinitely more agreeable to the Oriental mind than the general precept that God will forgive his truly penitent children. How romantic

and how enchanting to me are the memories of those *sehrat* (evening gatherings) at my father's house! How simple and how human was the homely wisdom of the stories and the parables which were spoken on those occasions. The elderly men of the clan loved to speak of what "was said in the ancient days" (*qadeem ezzeman*). "*Qal el-mathel*" (said the parable) prefaced almost every story. And as the speaker proceeded to relate a parable and to add to it his own observations as he went, we listened and looked forward very excitedly to the *maana* (meaning, or moral).

In picturing the condition of one who has been demoralized beyond redemption, the entertaining speaker proceeds in this fashion: "Once upon a time a certain man fell from the housetop and was badly injured. The neighbors came and carried him into the house and placed him in bed. Then one of his friends approached near to the injured man and said to him, 'Asaad, my beloved friend, how is your condition [*kief halak*]?' The much-pained man opened his mouth and said, 'My

two arms are broken; my back and one of my legs are broken; one of my eyes is put out; I am badly wounded in the breast, and feel that my liver is severed. But I trust that God will restore me.' Whereupon his friend answered, 'Asaad, I am distressed. But if this is your condition, it will be much easier for God to make a new man to take your place than to restore you!'"

One of the most beautiful parables I know, and which I often heard my father relate, bears on the subject of partiality, and is as follows:

"Once upon a time there were two men, the one named Ibrahim, the other Yusuf. Each of the men had a camel. It came to pass that when Yusuf fell sick he asked of his neighbor Ibrahim, who was about to journey to Alappo, to take his camel with him also, with a load of merchandise. Yusuf begged Ibrahim to treat the camel in exactly the same manner as he did his own, and promised him that if God kept him alive until he came back he would repay him both the good deed and the cost of

the camel's keep. Ibrahim accepted the trust, and took his journey to Alappo, with the two camels. Upon his return Yusuf saw that his own camel did not look so well as Ibrahim's. So he spoke to his friend: 'Ibrahim, by the life of God, what has happened to my camel? He is not in as good condition as your camel. O Ibrahim, did you care for my camel as you did for your camel?' Then Ibrahim answered and said, 'By the life of God, O Yusuf, I fed, and watered, and groomed your camel as I did my camel. God witnesseth between us, Yusuf, this is the truth. But I will say to you, you my eyes, my heart, that when night came and I laid me down on my cloak to sleep between the two camels, I placed my head nearer to my camel than to yours.'"

It was the desirableness to Orientals of this type of speech which prompted the writer of the Gospel of Matthew to say of Jesus, "And without a parable spake he not unto them." [1]

Parables are word pictures. They entertain and instruct at the same time. To the Ori-

[1] Matt. XIII, 34.

entals the more direct method of teaching is very dull. In the parable of the two camels just quoted it would have been easy to state the fact in a few words; to say that even a little partiality might have serious effects. That, however, would have been most uninteresting.

It is not my purpose here to speak of all Jesus' parables. Some of them will come before us in other chapters of this book. I will, therefore, give only a few of them for the purpose of illustrating the thought of this chapter and describing Syrian life as Jesus lived it and as I knew it.

In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew, we have the parable of the wheat and the tares: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also."

The tare (*zewan*) is a grain which when ground with the wheat and eaten causes dizzi-

ness and nausea, a state much like seasickness. For this reason this plant is hated by the Syrians, although they use tares very extensively as chicken feed. Wheat merchants are likely to sell *kameh mizwen* (wheat mixed with tares) in hard times, because they can buy it for less money than pure wheat. I do not believe there is a family among the common people of Syria which has not suffered at one time or another from "tare-sickness." Having tasted the bitterness of this sickness a few times myself, I do not at all wonder at the Syrians' belief that tares must have come into the world by the Devil. And what I still remember with both amusement and sympathy are the heartfelt curses which the afflicted ones always showered upon the seller of the "tarey wheat." When the food had taken real effect and the staggering, nauseated members of a family felt compelled to allow nature to take its course, the gasps and groans punctuated the ejaculations, "May God destroy his home!" "May the gold turn into dust in his hands!" "May he spend the

price of what he sold us at the funerals of his children!" — and so forth.

The fifteenth chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel contains the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. The parable of the lost sheep is discussed in another chapter. The parable of the lost coin portrays a very familiar scene in the ordinary Syrian home. "What woman," says the Master, "having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost."

The candle spoken of here is a little olive-oil lamp — an earthen saucer, with a protruding lip curled up at one point in the rim for the wick. How often did I hold that flickering light for my mother while she searched for a lost coin or some other precious object. The common Syrian house has one door and one or two small windows, with

wooden shutters, without glass.[1] Consequently the interior of the house is dimly lighted, especially in the winter season. The scarcity of money in the hands of the people makes the loss of a coin, of the value of that which is mentioned in the parable (about sixteen cents), a sad event. The little house is searched with eager thoroughness — "diligently." The straw mats, cushions, and sheepskins which cover the floor are turned over, and the earthen floor swept. The search continues, with diligence and prayerful expectations, until the lost coin is found. The Arabic Bible states that the gladdened woman "calls her *women* neighbors and friends [*jaratiha wesedikatiha*], saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost." The singling out of the *women* neighbors is significant here. As a rule the loss of a precious coin by a woman calls her husband's wrath upon her, regardless of whether the coin had been earned by her or by him. The

[1] See my autobiography, *A Far Journey*, chap. I, entitled "My Father's House."

women friends have a keen fellow-feeling in such matters. They keep one another's secrets from the men, and rejoice when one of their number escapes an unpleasant situation.

The full meaning of this parable is plain as it is most precious. Through this common occurrence in a Syrian home, Jesus impresses upon the minds of his hearers, as well as all mankind, the infinite worth of the human soul, and the Father's love and care for it. "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

The parable of the prodigal son follows immediately that of the lost coin. "A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

"And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living." The singling out of the younger son for this adventure

agrees with a highly valued Eastern idea of the family. The elder son, who was the first-born male child in this household, could not very well be made to commit such an act. In a Syrian family the *bikkr* (the first-born son) stands next to the father in the esteem, not only of the members of his own household, but of the community at large. He cannot be supposed to be so rash, so unmindful of his birthright, as to break the sacred family circle, and to waste his inheritance in riotous living.

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have been filled with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him."

To be a swineherd, or a "swine-shepherd," is the most contemptible occupation an Oriental can think of. The pig is to the Orientals in general an unclean animal. You could not hire a Syrian to make a pet of a "little piggie." If he did, he would be called "*Abu khenzier*"

(pig man) for the rest of his life, and transmit the unenviable title to his heirs, "even unto the third and fourth generation."

The word "husks" in the English version is not a correct rendering of the original term. The marginal note in the Revised Version reads, "the pods of the carob tree." The Arabic version says simply *kherrûb* (carob). The carob tree is very common in the lowlands of Syria. It is a large tree of dense foliage, and round, glossy, dark-green leaves. The pods it bears measure from five to ten inches in length, are flat, and largely horn-shaped. I do not know why the English translators of the Bible called those pods "husks." They are sold in almost every town in western Syria for food. Children are very fond of *kherrûb*. Some of the pods contain no small amount of sugar. In my boyhood days, a pocketful of *kherrûb*, which I procured for a penny, was to me rather a treat. The older people, however, do not esteem *kherrûb* so highly as do the children. The bulk of it is so out of proportion to the sugar it contains that

its poverty is proverbial in the land. Of one whose conversation is luxuriant in words and barren of ideas it is said, "It is like eating *kherrûb;* you have to consume a cord of wood in order to get an ounce of sweet." By eating these pods, the poor people seem to themselves "to have been filled," while in reality they have received but little nutrition. Therefore *kherrûb* is generally eaten by animals.

It may be observed that the saying in the parable, "and he would fain have been filled with *kherrûb* that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him," simply describes the prodigal's poverty. For as a "swine-shepherd" the "*kherrûb* that the swine did eat" was certainly very plentiful before him. The purpose of the passage is to draw the contrast between the rich parental home which the prodigal had willingly left and the extremely humble fare on which in his wretched state he was compelled to subsist.

"But when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's

have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight; I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Here we have a word picture full of humility, nobleness, generosity, and affection. The killing of the fatted calf refers to the old Eastern custom of *zebihat* (animal sacrifice).

The ancient custom was that the host honored his guest most highly by killing a sheep at the threshold of the house, upon the guest's arrival, and inviting him to step over the blood into the house. This act formed the "blood covenant" between the guest and his host. It made them one. To us one of the most cordial and dignified expressions in inviting a guest, especially from a distant town, was, "If God ever favors us with a visit from you, we will kill a *zebihat!*"

In his great rejoicing in the return of his son, the father of the prodigal is made to receive him as he would a most highly honored guest. "The fatted calf" — and not only a sheep — is killed as the *zebihat* of a new covenant between a loving father and his son, who "was dead and is alive again; was lost, and is found."

I will conclude this chapter with the parable of the "treasure hid in a field." "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth

and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."[1]

I could fill a book with the stories of hidden treasures which charmed my boyhood days in Syria. I have already put into print[2] a detailed account of my personal experience in digging for a hidden treasure. In Syria it is universally believed that hidden treasures may be found anywhere in the land, and especially among ancient ruins. The tales of the digging and finding of such treasures fill the country. There are thrilling tales of treasures in various localities. Gold and other valuables are said to have been dug up in sealed earthen jars, often by the merest accident, in the ground, in the walls of houses, under enchanted trees, and in sepulchers. From earliest childhood the people's minds are fed on these tales, and they grow up with all their senses open to the slightest suggestions of such possibilities. Of course, the expectation of getting such riches makes the

[1] Matt. XIII, 44.

[2] See my book, *The Hidden Treasure of Rasmola*, Houghton Mifflin Company.

diggers work day and night and brave all sorts of danger.

With such eagerness Jesus wants men to seek the kingdom of heaven. In his wonderful parables he used the simple customs of the East as means of preaching to the world the gospel of truth, love, and peace.

CHAPTER XIV

FOUR CHARACTERISTICS

I WISH before leaving the subject of Oriental speech to mention briefly four other characteristics of it. I do this because these features are met with in many places in the Bible.

The first is the many and picturesque dialects. The entire absence of the public school, the scarcity of books and periodicals, and the extreme slowness of transportation have always tended to keep the multitude of dialects in the speech of the Syrian people. At present the common language of the land is the Arabic, which is divided into two kinds — the book language and that of daily speech. The book language is one, but the common

language consists of a great many dialects. Each section of that small country has its *lehjah* (accent), and it is no exaggeration to say that each town within those sections has a *lehjah* of its own. Certain letters of the alphabet are also sounded differently in different localities. Thus, for an example, the word for "stood" is pronounced *qam* in certain localities, and *aam* in others. The word for "male" is pronounced *zeker* by some communities, and *deker* by others.

That such a state of things prevailed also in ancient Israel and in New Testament times is very evident. In the twelfth chapter of the Book of Judges we have the record of a fight between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites, in which we find the following statement: "And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth:

for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him."

In the fourteenth chapter of Saint Mark's Gospel we have another striking illustration of this characteristic of Oriental speech, in Peter's experience in the palace of the high priest. In the fifty-third verse it is said: "And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest." The record continues (verses 66–71): "And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: and when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch. . . . And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilæan, *and thy speech agreeth thereto.*" Peter spoke the dialect of Galilee in the city

of Jersualem, which had a different dialect. Then he was known to be one of Jesus' followers because the Master also spoke the dialect of Galilee.

The second characteristic is the juvenile habit of urging very greatly when asking a favor. This sort of begging in such manner the Americans call "nagging," and, of course, they dislike it very much. The Easterners do not consider it a bad habit. They think that people ought to grant favors, and that urging shows how real the need is. And I write these things not only to show the difference between the East and the West, but to enable my Western readers to have a better understanding of the Bible.

Here, for example, comes a man to borrow a hundred *piasters* (about four dollars) from another who does not like to lend him. So he begins:

"My friend, you are a truly good man who is always ready to do good. Will you not of your abundance lend me a hundred *piasters?*"

"No, I can't," comes the answer.

"Yes, yes, you can."

"No! I said I can't."

"By all the saints, I know you can, and I am in great need."

"By all the saints, I don't have the money; no use saying any more."

"I beg you with all my heart. My children are hungry and I am out of work. I will pay you back before long. God knows I will pay you."

The conversation continues for some time. It may be the would-be borrower goes away and "comes again another day," until finally he gets the money.

One of the most striking examples of this characteristic is the parable of the unrighteous judge, in the eighteenth chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel: "There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city, and she came unto him saying, Avenge me [the original is "do me justice"] of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not

God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, *lest by her continual coming she weary me.*"

Here is a case — by no means a rare exception in that country — where a judge rendered a verdict against his own best judgment in sheer self-defense. And I must say that, knowing such Oriental tendencies as I do, especially as manifested by widows, I am in deep sympathy with the judge.

Yet it was this very persistence in petitioning the Father of all men which gave mankind the great psalms and tender prayers of our Scriptures. Jesus recommends to his disciples the insistence of the widow as a means to draw the benediction of heaven upon them, and to secure for them justification at the hands of the righteous Judge. Honest seekers after spiritual gifts should not dislike to imitate this Oriental habit. They should never be afraid to come to their Father again and again for his gracious blessing, or refrain from "storming the gates of heaven with prayer."

The third characteristic may be described

by saying that the Orientals are a people who love intimate speech. They are also unreserved or gushing in their conversation.

It is not at all uncommon for old and tried friends in Syria to give and ask for affectionate assurances that they do love one another. Such expressions are the joy of life. Especially when new confidences are exchanged or great favors asked, a man turns with an innocent look to his trusted friend and says, "Now you love me; I say you love me, don't you?" "My soul, my eyes," answers the other, "you know what is in my heart toward you; you know and the Creator knows!" Then the request is made.

One of the noblest and tenderest passages in the New Testament, a passage whose spirit has fed the strength of the Christian missionaries throughout the ages, is that portion of the twenty-first chapter of Saint John's Gospel where Jesus speaks to Peter in this intimate Syrian fashion. How sweet and natural it sounds to a son of the East! "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon,

son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" How characteristic also is Peter's answer, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee." Then came the precious request, "Feed my lambs." Three times did the affectionate Master knock at the door of Peter's heart, till the poor impetuous disciple cried, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

The fourth characteristic of Oriental speech is its positiveness. Outside the small circles of Europeanized Syrians, such qualifying phrases as "in my opinion," "so it seems to me," "as I see it," and the like, are almost entirely absent from Oriental speech. The Oriental is never so cautious in his speech as a certain American editor of a religious paper, who in speaking of Cain described him as "the *alleged* murderer of Abel"! Such expressions, also, are not used in the Bible.

The language of the Oriental is that of sentiment and conviction. When you say to him, "I *think* this object is beautiful," if he does not think it is so, he says, "No, it is not beau-

tiful." Although he is expressing his own individual opinion, he does not take the trouble to make that perfectly clear: if an object is not beautiful to him, he does not say "*I think* it is not." He says, "It *is not* beautiful."

Of course such language is not in accord with good social customs. One should not be so positive in expressing his opinions. But the Easterner speaks like a prophet and not like one who is giving an opinion of his own. The prophet is convinced that what he speaks is divine truth and not an idea of his own. So spoke the prophets of the Scriptures. So did Jesus speak.

Take for an example his great saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." [1] How would this great utterance sound if given in the

[1] Luke IV, 18.

nice, cautious language of an "up-to-date" thinker? What force would it carry if put in this form: "It seems to me, although I may be entirely mistaken, that something like what may be termed the 'Spirit of the Lord' is upon me, and I feel that, in my own limited way, I must preach the Gospel"?

Of course we should be cautious in our conversation and not carry the impression that "we know it all." But many qualifications and "guesses" in expressing religious truths weaken it. Take this story for an illustration. It is said of a preacher, who was apparently afraid to make "rash statements," that in speaking to his people on repentance he had this for his final word: "If you do not repent, as it were, and be converted, in a measure, you will be damned, to a certain extent." The congregation that has such a preacher is in a very bad way. And I perceive some difference between such a preacher and Him who says, "Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom

of heaven." Here we have no "as it were," nor "in a measure," but a great truth expressed in a great manner.

So did those great Oriental prophets speak in the Bible. And the Bible is so full of spiritual power because it is not a book of "guesses" and opinions, but of deep visions and great spiritual experiences spoken as simply and directly as a child speaks.

CHAPTER XV

BREAD AND SALT

To an Oriental the phrase "bread and salt" has a sacred meaning. The saying, "There is bread and salt between us," is equal to saying, "We are bound together by a sacred bond of friendship." To say of one that he "knows not the significance of bread and salt" is equal to saying that he is an ungrateful wretch.

A noble foe refuses to "taste the salt" of his enemy — that is, to eat with him — so long as he feels disinclined to be reconciled to him. Such a foe dreads the thought of going back on the bread-and-salt covenant which the breaking of bread together forms.

As the son of a Syrian family I was brought up to think of bread as possessing a sacred significance. I never would step on a piece of bread fallen in the road, but would pick it up, press it to my lips for reverence, and place it in a wall or some other place where it would not be trodden upon.

What always seemed to me to be one of the finest customs of my people was their reverence for the *'aish* (bread; literally, "the life-giver"). While breaking bread together we would not rise to salute an arriving guest, whatever his social rank. Whether spoken or not, our excuse for not rising and engaging in the cordial Oriental salutation before the meal was ended was our reverence for the food (*hirmeiel-'aish*). We could, however, and always did, invite the newcomer most urgently to partake of the repast.

The food, especially the bread part, was to us something more than a material thing. It sustained our life, therefore it was God's own life given to us to feed upon. So when we prayed, "Give us this day our daily bread,"

we did not mean that God should send us the bread we needed without effort on our part to obtain it. It was rather a grateful acknowledgment that in the end our Heavenly Father was "the giver of all good and perfect gifts." This thought is beautifully expressed in the little poem:

> "Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,
> Back of the flour the mill;
> Back of the mill is the wheat and the shower
> And the sun and the Father's will."

It was because of this that wherever he broke bread Jesus blessed it and gave thanks. His blessed mother, Mary, must have kneaded bread as the Syrian women do with a deep sense of its sacredness. In my childhood days "kneading-day" at our house was always of peculiar significance to me. I had no toys or story-books to engage my attention, and it was with the greatest interest that I watched my mother go through the process of kneading. It was very much like a religious service.

After making the sign of the cross and naming the Holy Name, she drew the re-

quired quantity of flour out of a small opening near the bottom of the earthen barrel in which the precious meal was stored. It was out of such a barrel that the widow of "Zarephath which belongeth to Zidon" drew the "handful of meal" she had, and made of it a cake for Elijah, for which favor the fiery prophet prayed that the widow's barrel of meal "shall not waste."

Then my mother packed the flour in the shape of a crescent on one side of the large earthen *maajan* (kneading basin), which is about thirty inches in diameter. She dissolved the salt in warm water, which she poured into the basin by the embankment of flour. Then with a "God bless" she took out the leaven — a lump of dough saved from the former baking. This leaven she dissolved carefully in the salt water, and by slowly mixing the meal with this fluid she "hid" the leaven in the meal. It was this process which Jesus mentioned very briefly in the parable of the leaven in the thirteenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel. "The kingdom of heaven

is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."

The kneading done, my mother smoothed the surface of the blessed lump, dipped her hand in water, and with the edge of her palm marked a deep cross the whole length of the diameter of the basin, crossed herself three times, while she muttered a prayer, and then covered the basin and left the dough to rise. The same religious attitude was resumed when the raised dough was made into small loaves, during the baking, and whenever the mother of the family put her hand into the basin where the loaves were kept, to take out bread for her family's needs.

Does it now seem strange for such a woman to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread"? Shall we receive the gifts and forget the Giver? However long our way to our daily bread may be, the fact remains that we do feed on God's own life. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

CHAPTER XVI

HOSPITALITY: "COMPEL THEM TO COME IN"

THE hospitality of Orientals is much praised the world over. And while some Westerners have an exaggerated idea of Oriental generosity, the son of the East is not unjustly famous for his readiness to offer to wayfarers the shelter of his roof and his bread and salt. The person who fails to extend such hospitality brings reproach, not only upon himself, but upon his whole clan and town.

But whether hospitality is extended to strangers or to friends, it is the man who entertains, and not the woman. The invitation is extended in the name of the husband alone,

or, if the husband is not living, in the name of the eldest son. In the case of a widow who has no male children, a man relative is asked to act as host. The man of the house should not allow a wayfarer to pass him without offering him a "morsel of bread to sustain his heart." So did Abraham of old extend hospitality to the three mysterious strangers who came upon him "in the plains of Mamre," as stated in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, the second and following verses: "And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said, My Lord, if now I have found favor in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant; . . . and I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts: after that ye shall pass on."

How natural and how truly Syrian all this sounds! Sarah was not at all slighted because Abraham did not say, "Sarah and I will be glad to have you stop for lunch with us, if you

can." On the contrary, she was greatly honored by not being mentioned in the invitation.

It should be stated here that the prominent mention in the Gospels of Mary and Martha as Jesus' friends and entertainers is due to the fact that to those women the Master was not merely a *guest*, but a *saint*, nay, the "promised One of Israel." Yet — and it is not at all strange in view of Oriental customs — Jesus took with him none of his women friends and disciples on such great occasions as the Transfiguration and the Last Supper.

To extend hospitality in genuine Syrian fashion is no small undertaking. Brevity on such occasions is the soul of stinginess. Oriental effusiveness and intensity of speech are never more strenuously exercised than at such times. The brief form of the American invitation, "I should be pleased to have you dine with us, if you can," however sincere, would seem to an Oriental like an excuse to escape the obligation of hospitality. Again, the ready acceptance of an invitation in the West would seem to the son of the East utterly un-

dignified. Although the would-be guest could accept, he must be as insistent in saying, "No, I can't," as the would-be host in saying, "Yes, you must."

Approaching his hoped-for guest, a Syrian engages him in something like the following dialogue, with a glow of feeling which the translation can only faintly reveal:

"Ennoble us [*sherrifna*] by your presence."

"I would be ennobled [*nitsherref*], but I cannot accept."

"That cannot be."

"Yea, yea, it must be."

"No, I swear against you [*aksim 'aleik*] by our friendship and by the life of God. I love just to acquaint you with my bread and salt."

"I swear also that I find it impossible [*gheir mimkin*] to accept. Your bread and salt are known to all."

"Yea, do it just for our own good. By coming to us you come to your own home. Let us repay your bounty to us."

"*Astaghfero Allah* [by the mercy of God]

I have not bestowed any bounty upon you worth mentioning."

Here the host seizes his guest by the arm and with an emphatic, "I *will not* let you go," pulls at him and would drag him bodily into his house. Then the guest, happy in being vanquished "with honor," consents to the invitation.

Do you now understand fully the meaning of the passage in the fourteenth chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel? "A certain man made a great supper, and bade many . . . and they all with one consent began to make excuse . . . And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and *compel* them to come in, that my house may be filled."

Syrian rules of hospitality make it improper for a householder to ask a guest who has suddenly come to him such a question as "Have you had your lunch?" before putting food before him. The guest, even though he has not had the meal asked about by the host, considers it beneath his dignity to make the fact

known. Upon the arrival of such a visitor, the householder greets him with the almost untranslatable words, "*Ahlan wa sahlan.*" Literally translated, these words are "kindred and smooth ground"; which, elucidated further, mean, "You have come not to strangers, but to those who would be to you as your kindred are, and among us you tread smooth and easy ground." And even while the guest is being yet saluted by the man of the house in the lengthy manner of Oriental greeting, the good wife proceeds to prepare "a morsel" for the wayfarer, whatever hour of the day or night it may happen to be. The food then is placed before the guest and he is "compelled" to eat.

There is in the eleventh chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel a parabolic saying which is uncommonly rich in allusions to Syrian home life. Beginning with the fifth verse we read: "And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me, and I have nothing to set

before him; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee?"

Here we have a man to whom a guest comes at midnight; he must set something before him, whether the wayfarer is really hungry or not. The host happens to be short of bread, and he sets out to borrow a few loaves. The man at the door asks for three loaves. Three of those thin Syrian loaves is the average number for one individual's meal. It was for this reason that the Master used this number in the parable, and not because that was all the bread the occasion required. For obvious reasons, the host needed to put before his guest more than the exact number of loaves necessary for one adult's meal. Perhaps because he is very sleepy, the man "within" runs counter to the best Syrian customs in his answer. His excuse — that because the door is shut he cannot open it and accommodate his friend — has been a puzzle to a host of Western readers of the Bible. Could he not have

opened the door? Or, as a certain preacher asked in my hearing, "Could it be possible that the man, because of fear of robbers in that country, had a sort of combination lock on his door which could not be easily opened?" The simple fact is that in Syria as a rule the door of a house is never shut, summer or winter, until bedtime. The words of my father and mother to me whenever they thought that I had "remained wakeful" — that is, "stayed up" — longer than I should after they had gone to bed, — "Shut the door and go to sleep," — still ring in my ears. What the man "within" meant was, not that he could not open the door, but that at such a late hour, *after the door had been shut*, it was no time to call for such favors as the neighbor asked for.

"And my children are with me in bed." From this it may be inferred easily that individual beds and individual rooms are well-nigh unknown to the common people of Syria. The cushion-mattresses are spread side by side in the living room, in a line as long as the

members of the family, sleeping close together, require. The father sleeps at one end of the line, and the mother at the other end, "to keep the children from rolling from under the cover." So the man was absolutely truthful when he said by way of an excuse, "My children are with me in bed."

In the remaining portion of this parable, as in that of the unrighteous judge, Jesus emphasizes, by commending to his disciples, the Syrian habit of urging. "I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." Again, the Master gives dignity and elevation to the common customs of his people by using them as means of approach to high spiritual ideals, when he says, "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

CHAPTER XVII

FAMILY FEASTS

Of the feasts which are considered more strictly family affairs, I will speak of two which live in my memory clothed with romantic charms. The one is that which we enjoyed at the "killing of the sheep." As a rule every Syrian family fattens a sheep during the summer season. The housewife feeds the gentle animal by hand so many times during the day and so many during the night, until he is so fat that he "cannot rise from the ground." No person is expected to speak of this sheep or touch him without saying, "The blessing from God" (be upon the lamb). Oh, if I could but feel again the thrilling joy which was al-

ways mine when, as a small boy, I sat beside my mother and rolled the small "morsels" of mulberry and grape-leaves, dipped them in salted bran water, and handed them to my mother to feed the "blessed sheep"!

Early in the autumn came the time for "killing." Wherever my father was, he came home, for the father of the household must kill the sheep. The solemnity of the act robbed it for us of its cruelty. On the day of "killing" we sharpened the knives, crushed the salt in the stone mortar, and fed the sheep only sparingly. As the day began to decline the animal was "led to the slaughter" a short distance from the door, and laid gently on the ground, as the ancient sacrifice was laid before the Lord. My father, holding with his left hand the animal's head, made the sign of the cross with the knife on the innocent throat, and, in the name of God, slew the sheep.

The fact that many householders in a community "kill the sheep" on the same day makes the occasion a reproduction of the night of the exodus from Egypt. In the twelfth

chapter of the Book of Exodus, the third and sixth verses, Jehovah speaks to Moses concerning Israel, saying, "In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house. . . . And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening."

With a few intimate friends we feasted at the killing of the sheep, and then cut the red meat into small pieces "the size of a fledgeling's head," fried it in fat, and sealed it in glazed earthen jars for our winter use.

The other most joyous feast was that of the *Marafeh* — the carnivals which precede the Great Lent. For about two weeks before Lent begins, the Christians of the East give themselves over to feasting. The dish which is a great favorite on this occasion is called *kibbey*. It is made of meat and crushed wheat. The meat is "beaten" in a stone mortar, with a large wooden masher, until it is reduced to a very fine pulp. Then the crushed wheat,

soaked in cold water, is mixed with the meat, together with a generous supply of spices and salt. The whole mixture is then "beaten" together so thoroughly that when rightly done it resembles a lump of dough.

The writer of the Book of Proverbs, with characteristic Syrian intensity, alludes to the process of *kibbey*-making in one of his assaults upon "the fool." In the twenty-second verse of the twenty-seventh chapter he says, "Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him."

Be that as it may, the craving of a Syrian for *kibbey* (and I fully know whereof I speak) makes the craving of a Bostonian for baked beans and fish-balls for a Sunday breakfast pale into insignificance.

During *Marafeh* friends and neighbors feast together until the last night preceding the beginning of Lent. The feast of that night is one of family solemnity, upon which no outsiders may intrude. The members of the family come together to eat the last feast

and drink their cup of wine before entering upon the sacred period of self-denial, fasting, and prayer. As at the ancient sacrificial feasts, all the members of the family must be present.

On that sacred and joyous evening my mother spreads the feast, and with most tender and pious affections my parents call their sons and daughters to surround the low table. On this occasion, much as at the Last Supper, the wine is passed to every one of us.[1] "Drink ye all of it" is my father's command; for who can tell whether the family circle will remain unbroken until the Easter festival? Not a trace of the feast is kept in the house until the morrow. What is not eaten is burned or thrown away, for on the next day no meat, eggs, or milk are permitted to the faithful until the Easter bell heralds the tidings of the resurrection.

So did the Master speak to his disciples on

[1] The original use of the wine-cup in the East was for religious and fraternal purposes. The modern vulgar use of it, which has ruined millions of lives and thousands of families, deserves to be prohibited the world over.

the eve of his suffering. In the twenty-sixth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel we read, "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. . . . But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Thus from the simplest conception of bread as a means to satisfy physical hunger to the highest thought of it as a sacramental element, the Orientals have always eaten bread with a sense of sacredness. "Bread and salt," "bread and wine," "Christ the bread of life," "For we, being many, are one bread," "Give us this day our daily bread," these and other sayings current in the Bible and in the Oriental speech all spring from the deepest life of the ancient East.

And the sacredness of this common article of food has been of the greatest value to Oriental peoples. In the absence of other means of social unity, and the higher civil interests which bind men together, it has been

a great blessing indeed to those much-divided Orientals to find peace and security in the simple saying, "There is bread and salt between us."

CHAPTER XVIII

TRAVELERS UNDER ORDERS

TRAVELING by the "Twentieth Century, Limited," is fast transit; but, excepting in case of a wreck, the trip is devoid of incident. The mechanical perfection of the conveyance and the infallibility of the time-table reduce journeying to transportation. There is no girding of the loins, no pilgrim's staff, no salutations by the way, and no wayfarer's song. The journey is not humanized by the tender care for the camel, the mule, and the ass, nor are the hunger and thirst satisfied by the breaking of bread beside the lonely springs of water.

The terrors and triumphs of Saint Paul in his "journeyings often, in perils of waters,

in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, . . . in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, . . . in cold and nakedness," [1] are all to the modern Western traveler echoes of a remote past.

But such are still the common experiences of the sons of the East. One of the heroic wedding songs which was much in vogue in my boyhood days was this (addressed to the bride): "Thy father, O beauteous one, journeyed to Damascus alone!" Previous to the introduction of the railway train, which now runs between Beyrout and Damascus, the journey from my home town to the latter city consumed two days. In those days, as is still the case in many parts of Syria, men traveled in large groups for protection from the "hidden dangers of the way," and he who journeyed to the ancient city alone was proclaimed hero. My memories of the tales of adventure which I heard the men relate are very thrilling. Tales of encounters with rob-

[1] 2 Cor. xi, 26, 27.

bers, battles with snakes and wild beasts, suffering from the insufficiency of "the food for the way" (*zad*) and the thirst occasioned by the early "failure," that is, the drying up, of springs of water which had been thought to be still flowing.

In those long summer days, when the mouth of the traveler on the dusty roads of Syria "turns bitter from the thirst," the arrival at a spring which had "failed" is almost a tragic experience. Hence it is that the "springs of water" are one of the precious promises of the Bible, and their failure was one of the fearful threats.

It was, indeed, a call to his disciples to make the great sacrifice when Jesus sent them out to preach the glad tidings of the kingdom which was "at hand." His command to them was, "Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves." [1] So far as regards the comforts and protection that earthly things can give,

[1] Matt. x, 9, 10.

those disciples were sent out perfectly helpless. The Master's programme for them is just the opposite of that which an ordinary Oriental traveler follows.

No traveler in the interior of Syria ever starts out on a journey, be it short or long, without *zad*. True, Syrian generosity to a wayfarer is to be depended upon, but the custom of the country is that self-respect requires that a traveler shall provide himself with *zad*, and shall accept hospitality only as a last resort. The best etiquette requires that when a traveler is invited to another's table, he shall take out his *zad* and place it before him. The host, on the other hand, positively refuses to allow his chance guest to eat of his own *zad*. The host removes the *zad* from the table, and either adds to it and gives it to the guest upon his departure or gives him a new *zad*. Without scrip, the traveler seems to himself to be utterly a dependent, a beggar, and not a guest.

"Put up a few loaves for *zad*," is the first thing said when a person is about to start out

on a journey. The thin loaves are folded into small bundles, which may contain such delicacies as ripe black olives, cheese, boiled eggs, and figs conserved in grape molasses, and wrapped up in a large napkin, which the traveler ties around his waist, with the bread on the back. The bread is often carried also in a leather bag (*jerab*). This is the "scrip" and "wallet" of the Gospel command. On a long journey, say of a day or more, the thin bread dries up and breaks into small pieces. A dry and crumby *zad* indicates a long journey.

"Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses." The original text has "girdles" instead of "purses." While traveling in the East we always carried our money in the girdle and only a few coins in the purse. The girdle of the present day is a stout woolen or cotton belt, which is called, in the vernacular Arabic, *kummer*. It is worn under the sash, and the longest specimen of it measures about five feet. It is double to the length of about thirty inches. The two folds are very securely sewed together at the edge, and only a small

opening provided near the buckle, through which the money is inserted. The double part, containing the money, is first fastened around the waist by means of a short leather buckle, then the single part is wound over it. *It may be seen here* that in case of an encounter with robbers, the money cannot be snatched from its owner until he is completely subdued by his assailant.

The common people of Syria speak of the *kummer* as of a man's financial strength. There are practically no bank accounts. "How is the *kummer?*" means, "How do you stand financially?" To tap the *kummer* cheerfully indicates good circumstances. It is joy and glory for a youth when he reaches the age when he may have a *kummer*. The thrill of satisfaction which that possession gives still lingers with me. It was a sign of maturity and independence for me to tap that Scriptural girdle which I wore, when I had money in it. It was my treasure!

From all this it may be noted that the Master's command, "Provide neither gold, nor

silver, nor brass in your girdles," meant, not only to carry no money on their missionary journey, but to seek and *hoard* no money.

The part of the command which says, "Neither two coats," means two changes of clothing. The thing sought here, however, as well as in the saying, "Neither shoes," is not the abandonment of the necessary wearing apparel, but willing self-denial.

"Nor yet staves." The staff, or the "stick of travel," is the symbol of journeying in Syria. There, *Elkeina el'asa* (rested the staff) means we reached the end of our journey. *El'asa* (staff) occupies a significant place in Syrian lore. It is difficult for me to imagine a Syrian starting on a journey without an *'asa*. The Israelites were given clear directions concerning their preparations for the journey on the eve of their exodus from Egypt. They were told [1] to eat the lamb of the passover "with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, *and your staff in your hand.*"

In our travels in Syria the staff was to us a

[1] Exod. xii, 11.

most valuable support in climbing the steep hills, crossing the streams of water, battling with snakes and ferocious dogs, and with highway robbers. "The staff is a companion" is a current saying in the land. The disciples were commanded in this manner to turn away from the material interests of this world, and to give themselves wholly to the preaching of the kingdom. In their need and in their weakness they were to be rich and strong through their vision of the higher life.

In the tenth chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel, Jesus' commission to the disciples contains the command, "And salute no man by the way." It would seem strange, indeed, that those messengers of peace and good-will, who were being sent out to spread the leaven of friendliness and good cheer in the world, should be commanded by their Master to salute no man by the way. But when it is known in what manner the Orientals salute one another on those weary journeys, the Gospel restriction will not seem so very strange. Wayfarers in the East do not content themselves

with the severely brief Western salutation, "How d' you do; nice day," and then pass on. The Oriental salutation is a generous flow of soul, whose intimacy and inquisitiveness are quite strange to the mind of the West.

When the ways of two travelers meet, or the one overtakes the other, and they decide to *yatrafeko* (be companion the one to the other) and "wear away the road in friendly speech," the salutation runs as follows: —

"*Allah y'atek el'afieh* [May God give you health and strength]."

"*Allah y'afie imrak* [May God refresh and strengthen your life]."

"Whence has your excellent presence come, and whither are you facing?"

"From Nazareth have I come, and am facing towards Damascus."

"What is the precious name?"

"Your humble servant Mas'ud, son of Yusuf of the clan of Ayyub [Job]."

"*Wann'am, wann'am* [All honor, all honor]!"

"*Wann'am* to your excellent presence, and your respected clan!"

"What are your years?"

"My years, friend, are four and thirty."

"May your life be long and happy!"

"May Allah lengthen your days!"

"What children have you?" (It is taken for granted that a man of that age has been long since married.)

"Three sons in the keeping of God."

"Long life to them and health and happiness!"

"What men does your clan count?"

"We turn out *seb'een baroody* [seventy shotguns]."

"*Seb'een baroody!* Valiant men. What enemies have you in your native town?"

"Our chief enemy is the clan of Haddad. They turn out one hundred *baroody*, but whenever the iron gets hot [that is, whenever a fight occurs] we shatter their forces."

Thus the mutually complimentary conversation and the searching of hearts continue until each of the travelers is thoroughly in-

formed concerning the personal, domestic, and social affairs of the other. The trade, the income, the profession, the cares and anxieties, and even the likes and dislikes of each are made known to the other before their ways part.

Hence the Master's command, "Salute no man by the way." Surely the intention was not to be rude and unfriendly to fellow travelers, but to be completely absorbed by the glorious message of the Gospel. The command was given because "the king's business required haste." Even an Oriental must quicken his pace when his mission is "to seek and to save that which was lost."

CHAPTER XIX

THE MARKET-PLACE

I CANNOT think of the market-place in the East without at the same time thinking of the camel caravan. In many parts of Syria, the arrival of the caravan makes the market. *El-habbet* (the grain) is the chief commodity, and the camel is the chief carrier. In very recent years the railway train has to a certain extent taken from the camel his ancient occupation, but it has by no means completely supplanted the "ship of the desert."

The coming of camel caravans from the "land of the east" to our Lebanon town, laden with the "blessed grain," is one of my most enchanted memories of outdoor life in Syria.

The sight of a train of camels, with their curved necks bridging the spaces between them, suggests to the beholder an endless line. It is not at all surprising to me to read the assertion of the writer of the seventh chapter of the Book of Judges, where he speaks of the Midianites and Amalekites, that "their camels were without number, as the sand of the seaside for multitude." It seems to me that it does not require more than a train of one hundred camels to convey the idea of endlessness.

At the first glimpse of the approaching caravan we boys would swarm to the saha (the open space) of the town. There the caravan unloads, and awaits the buyers of wheat. It makes me long for my early years when I read in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Book of Genesis the story of Abraham's servant when he journeyed to Mesopotamia. "And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master and departed. . . . And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, even the

time that women go out to draw water." It is decidedly thrilling to hear the cameleer say, *ich, ich, i—ch—ch!* and pull at the halter of his camel to make him "kneel." And, with a friendly roar, the great beast drops, first forward on his huge, thick, hardened knees, then comes down on his haunches, and then, swaying in all directions, like an island shaken by an earthquake, rests his huge body on the ground.

"At the time of the evening [in the late afternoon], even the time that women go out to draw water," the camels are led to the fountains to be watered. The ancient writer's reference to "the time that women go out to draw water" is to a Syrian as definite as the reference to a Swiss clock. *Wakket elmeliah* (the time to fill the jars) is in the early morning and the late afternoon. For obvious reasons the women choose the "cool of the day" for carrying their heavy jars of water from the fountain to the house. The Syrian women have faithfully kept this custom from before the days of Abraham. And it is in the

cool of the day that the cameleers also deem it best to water their precious animals. The women always view this event with disfavor. The thirsty camels completely drain the pond into which the surplus water of the slender fountain flows, and which the housewives put to other household uses than drinking. No doubt the ancient Israelitish women in certain sections of Palestine grumbled when the cameleers drew heavily out of the wells on which the home-makers depended entirely for their water supply.

But to us boys the occasion was festive. By bribing the cameleers with gifts of grapes, figs, raisins, or any other sweets, for which the appetite of the Bedouins is very keen, we were allowed to mount the camels and lead them to the water. It may be true, as some scholars assert, that the swaying walk of the camel first quickened the measured song of the Arab, but my first camel ride was anything but poetical. I had, upon the arrival of the caravan, smuggled from our store of raisins two large pocketfuls, the one with which

to bribe the Bedouin to give me a ride, the other to eat while on the camel's back, like a gay rider. As I climbed confidently on the wooden saddle of the kneeling beast, the Arab, who was already devouring the raisins, stems and all, by the handful, gave the familiar signal, *tshew, tshew*, and instantly the thirsty camel rose and flew toward the fountain. I felt as if my brain was being torn off its base. I lost the sense of direction, and seemed to myself to be suspended between earth and heaven, tossed by violent winds. I screamed; but the Bedouin would not let me down until I promised him the other pocketful of raisins.

In Syria the *sûk* (market-place) is more than a place of exchange of commodities. It is rather an occasion of varied business and social interests. The Oriental knows no business without sociability. His *dekkan* (store) is a gathering-place for friends, and a business transaction with him, especially in the interior of the country, is almost always preceded by a friendly visit with the customer. So the market is a place where the dignitaries of the

town meet and exchange salutations and discuss various interests. The social nature of such occasions is indicated in Jesus' warning to his disciples, "Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and *love salutations in the market-places*." [1] Apparently those teachers of Israel were very frequent visitors at the markets, where men of all classes paid them the high regard which their office, if not their person, merited. Discussions of all sorts of subjects are carried on at the market. So it was in Athens in Saint Paul's time, where he "disputed . . . in the market daily with them that met with him." [2] And, of course, the children love to gather in the market-place, play their pranks, and watch the interesting activities of their elders. It was to such a crowd of youngsters that Jesus likened the fickle and peevish men of his time. In the eleventh chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, the sixteenth verse, he says, "But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, who call unto

[1] Mark xii, 38. [2] Acts xvii, 17.

their fellows and say, We piped unto you, and ye did not dance; we wailed, and ye did not mourn."

To my youthful mind the chief charm of the market-place was the *keyyal* (measurer). The strong man who measured the wheat will live in my memory as long as life endures. He it is who gives the "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over." In Syria the custom is that every measure must run over. Friendship must forever be mixed with business. Liquid measures, also, of such things as milk and oil, must run over a little into the vessel of the buyer, for "with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."[1]

After the price has been agreed upon, the sturdy cameleer spreads his large cloak on the ground and pours the golden grain in a heap upon it. The *keyyal* kneels by the little hillock of wheat, and, naming the Holy Name, thrusts the *midd* (a wooden measure) into the precious wheat. The grain is sacred; therefore, the

[1] Matt. VII, 2.

language of the *keyyal* must be pious. As he tosses the first measure into the buyer's bag, or the skirt of his cloak, he says, "Blessing!" that means "One"; "From God" means "Two." Then the counting is continued in the ordinary language—three, four, and so on.

After it is first thrust into the heap of wheat, the *midd*, about half full, is whirled around on its bottom, lifted slightly from the ground and dropped several times. The *keyyal*, constantly repeating the number of the *midds* he has already measured, "lest he forget," pours the wheat into the measure with his hands, packs it down with his palms, and all his strength. He whirls the *midd* round again, shakes it, presses it, and again heaps the wheat, pyramid-like, above the rim. The circular shower of the golden grain falls gently over the edges. The artful *keyyal* pours small handfuls of wheat with his right hand into his left, which is formed into a funnel over the apex of the heaped *midd*, until the point is as "sharp as a needle's." Then with swift deftness, which elicits the admiration of the spectators, he

lifts the heaped measure and tosses it into the bag, without allowing a single grain to fall outside.

With what telling effect and rich simplicity does the Master allude to this custom of measuring grain in the Eastern markets. In the sixth chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel, the command and the promise are, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." But the word "bosom" here somewhat weakens the sense of the text. I do not know why the English translators used it in place of the original word "lap." The Oriental does not carry grain in his *bosom*, but in the skirt of his wide garment, much as a woman carries things in the fold of her apron. Again the word "lap" is used here in another and a more significant sense. It is the symbol of plentifulness; just as the "bosom" is the symbol of affection. The generous measure, even though it be poured into one's bag, as a *blessing*, may be said to be given into his *lap*.

HE LIFTS THE HEAPED MEASURE AND TOSSES IT INTO THE BAG

Here again, as in many other Scriptural passages, Jesus gives the ideal spiritual touch to the common things of life. Here an ordinary act is made the symbol of the fullness of the spiritual life. He whose life is like the divine Parent's life — a constant outgoing and an everlasting gift — shall never lack anything. Men will be taught by his generosity how to be generous themselves, and the divine Giver will give him of the fullness of his own life. There is no want which the divine life cannot fill, and no hunger which it cannot satisfy.

CHAPTER XX

THE HOUSETOP

While a caravan of camels needs no other means than its own majestic appearance to herald its arrival in a town, muleteer merchants shout their wares from the housetop. Upon the arrival of a muleteer in the *saha* of the town with a load of lentils, potatoes, apricots, or any other commodity, he "drops the load" from the animal's back onto the ground, and goes upon the roof of the nearest house and shouts his wares at the top of his voice. To reach the earthen roof of the one-story Syrian house needs no extension ladder. It is so easily and quickly reached by the few rough stone steps in the rear of the house that Jesus,

in speaking of the incredibly swift coming of the "end," in the twenty-fourth chapter in Saint Matthew's Gospel, says, "Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house." So sudden was to be the end of all things "because iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold," that even the short distance between the housetop and the ground could not be safely traveled by those who cared for earthly possessions.

The ease with which the roof of an ordinary Syrian house is reached accounts also for the carrying of the man who was "sick of the palsy" upon the housetop. The account in the second chapter of Saint Mark's Gospel, third and fourth verses, runs, "And they came unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was; and when they had broken it up they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay."

This account describes perfectly the process

of making an opening in a Syrian roof. That roof is constructed as follows: The main timbers which carry the roof covering are laid across, horizontally, at intervals of about two to three feet. Crosswise over the timbers are laid the *khasheb* (sticks long enough to bridge the spaces between), quite close together. Over the *khasheb* reeds and branches of trees and thistles are laid, and the whole is covered with about twelve inches of earth. The dirt is rolled down by a stone roller and made hard enough to "shed water." In winter the roof is rolled with a stone roller almost every day and thus kept water-tight. This job falls to the man of the house, who does it, but not very cheerfully. In many houses during the summer season an opening, called *qafa'a*, is made in the roof for the purpose of letting down the grain and other provisions which are dried in the sun on the housetop. The space between the timbers admits easily the large basket called *sell*, which is as big around as a bushel basket.

Now, those who let down the palsied man

either made an entirely new opening in the roof, or simply extended the *qafa'a* enough to admit the unfortunate man in his folded quilt or thick cushion, tied by the four corners. And it was this which Jesus commanded him to carry, when he said to him, "Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk."

Sleeping on the housetop in the summer season is an Oriental custom the advantage of which the Occident has just "discovered." To use the roofs of high buildings in American cities as sleeping quarters is a "new" suggestion of that genius known as the "social reformer." To the ancient East, there "is no new thing under the sun." However, to *dwell* on the housetop is an expression which means poverty. Nevertheless the writer of Proverbs says:[1] "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house."

From the housetop the muleteer merchant shouts his wares; from the housetop men call one another for various purposes; from the

[1] Prov. xxi, 9.

housetop the watchers of the vineyards proclaim the names of trespassers; and from that elevation the special orders of the governor of the district are proclaimed to the populace. By night or by day, whenever we heard a voice calling from a housetop, we listened most intently in order to catch the message. The voice of the crier is so much like a distant, prolonged railway whistle that in my first few years in America, whenever I heard such a sound, especially in the night, I listened by force of habit, expecting to hear a message.

How often must Jesus have heard the free and full voice of the crier from the housetop! How it must have appealed to him as the very opposite of the whisperings of fear, cowardice, and doubt, may be realized from his command to his disciples. In the tenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel we read Christianity's declaration of independence. Here the antagonism of the world is pictured with complete fullness. "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves," "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." "Fear them

not . . . for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known." In the face of all hatred and danger and death the Master's command to those who carried the world-saving message was, "What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetop."

In the rainless Syrian summer the housetop is used for various household purposes. The grass which grows on the earthen roof, especially on its thick edges, dries up early in the season. To this the Scripture alludes in several places where it speaks of the enemies of Israel as being "like the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up." In some cases the whole roof is plastered with clay mortar and used for drying grain, fruits, and vegetables. Also in the summer season the housetop is used for holding wedding festivities and funeral gatherings, which almost all the adult inhabitants of the town are supposed to attend.

The custom of praying on the housetop,

which has come down from the time when the Syrians worshiped the "hosts of heaven," still survives in the East. In the first chapter of the Book which bears his name, the prophet Zephaniah threatens with the awful punishment of Jehovah those who practiced this kind of worship. "I will also stretch out mine hand upon Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place . . . and *them that worship the host of heaven upon the housetops*." This custom remains in Syria, although to a much lesser extent than in the past, and it is "the God of the whole earth" that is worshiped, and not the stars.

It was while he was praying on the housetop of Simon the tanner in the city of Joppa that the great vision came to Peter. We are told it was about the sixth hour, which, according to Oriental calculation, was the noon hour.

In the tenth chapter of the Book of Acts the story is as follows. "Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour; and he became very hungry, and would have

eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth; wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."

Peter obeyed. That Oriental, who was not afraid of the voice of God, took the lesson to heart. Presently we see this obedient disciple again at the home of Cornelius, the Roman, and hear him interpret his own vision. "Of a truth," he said to the Roman soldier, "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Here we have the sure foundation for Christian unity and human brotherhood. "Other

foundation can no man lay." When all the sects and nations who profess to be the followers of Jesus Christ come to realize with deep sincerity that "God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him," then will the world have real reason to expect swords to be beaten into ploughshares, and to hope for the coming of God's kingdom upon the earth.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VINEYARDS AND THE FIELDS

From very ancient times the vine and the fig tree have been the Oriental's chief joy. Together with their actual value they possessed for him a sacred symbolic value, especially the vine. The fullness and sweetness of their fruits symbolized the joys of the kingdom of heaven. Christ used "the fruit of the vine" as the visible means of spiritual communion. In the fifteenth chapter of Saint John's Gospel the Master says, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." The vine, as a symbol of spiritual as well as physical family unity, is spoken of in the Old Testament. Israel was Jehovah's vine. "Thou hast brought a vine

out of Egypt" is the sad but trustful cry of the writer of the eightieth Psalm: "thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparest room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. . . . Return, we beseech thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine; and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted."

We always thought and spoke of the Church as "the vine which God has planted." We spoke also of the family as a vine. One of the tenderest passages in the whole Bible is the third verse of the one hundred and twenty-eighth Psalm: "Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table."

"They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid," [1] is Micah's vision of peace and safety. To sit in the luxuriant shade of the fig tree was a daily blessing to us in the summer season. It must have been in that season of

[1] Mic. iv, 4.

the year that Jesus first met Nathanael. In the first chapter of Saint John's Gospel we read: "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, *when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.*"

I have no doubt that Nathanael's habit of sitting under the fig tree was one of the sure signs that he was "an Israelite indeed."

The English version of the Bible speaks of the place where the grapes are squeezed as the "wine press." This is not exactly correct. The word "wine" should not be used in this connection. The "grape press" is a more correct expression, as the Easterners do not always make wine of the grapes; they make more grape sugar or molasses than anything else. In either case, however, the word "press" is likely to be misleading in this mechanical age. The grapes are not *pressed* by any machine, but are trodden with the

feet. Therefore, to the Orientals the press is *ma'sara* (squeezing place). The grapes are thrown in a heap on a stone-flagged enclosure about the size of an ordinary room, and trodden by the men in their bare feet. Much gayety marks the *ma'sara* season. The work is carried on day and night until all the grapes which had been gathered by the various families for the *ma'sara* are "squeezed." The quaint songs and stories which I always loved to hear the "treaders" exchange, as they walked back and forth over the grapes, come to me now like the echoes of a distant past.

When I was a boy the "grape and fig season" was to me the chief joy of the year. To stroll among the vines early in the season and search for ripe grapes was even more enjoyable than searching for the first wild flowers in the spring. And just like finding the earliest flowers as they peeked timidly from under the dead leaves the finding of the first ripe grapes was a delightfully exciting discovery. No less delightful also was my search for the ripe and delicious figs. The children of North Amer-

ica never eat fresh figs. They are most delicious. To pick them off the tree early in the morning while the dew is still on them and eat them cold is a real joy. There are five varieties of figs of different colors and flavors. They are the white, the yellow, the pink, the green, and the black. The white variety, which is sold generally in this country, is the sweetest. My favorites were the green and the black. Perhaps their milder sweetness and peculiar flavor, which enabled me to eat more of them, determined my choice. The figs which are not eaten fresh are dried in the sun and kept for winter use, or sold for exportation.

The life of the Syrian farmer is very romantic. He still farms as the people of Bible times did. If the men who tilled Abraham's fields in Hebron should rise from the dead today, they would find that the four thousand years of their absence from the earth had made no essential changes in the methods and means of farming in the "land of promise." They would lay their hand to the plough

and proceed to perform their daily tasks, as though nothing had happened. A very few European ploughs are being tried in certain sections of Syria, but that is all.[1]

The Syrian sower goes forth to sow with his long, primitive plough on his right shoulder, the yoke hanging from the left shoulder and the leather bag of seed strapped to his back. In his left hand he carries his long, hard, strong goad — the same as the one with which "Shamgar, son of Anath, slew of the Philistines six hundred men." Through this simple instrument he keeps in touch with his pair of oxen, or cows, which pace leisurely before him. The plough, which consists of two wooden beams joined together, measures about twelve feet in length. The quantity of wood in the Syrian plough makes plain the meaning of the passage in the story of the prophet Elisha, son of Shaphat. In the nineteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings, the nineteenth verse, we have the account of Eli-

[1] At present the French are occupying Syria and introducing more machinery.

jah's first meeting with his successor Elisha, when he was ploughing in the field, "with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth." So, when Elijah cast his mantle upon him, the son of Shaphat "took a yoke of oxen, and slew them, *and boiled their flesh with the instruments of the oxen*, and gave unto the people, and they did eat." There was enough wood in the plough and the yoke to boil a pair of oxen.

At the forward end the long plough is hooked to the yoke, and at the rear end joined to a cross-piece, whose upper end forms the *cabousa* (handle); and the lower holds the iron ploughshare. When he puts "his hand to the plough," he simply grasps the *cabousa* with his right hand while he wields the goad with his left. The uneven, stony ground and the lightness of the plough compel him to maintain a firm hold on it, and to look ever *forward*. In the ninth chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel, the sixty-second verse, Jesus makes excellent use of this point when he says, "No man, having put his hand to the

plough, and *looking back*, is fit for the kingdom of God."

The parable of the sower, in the thirteenth chapter of Saint Matthew's Gospel, is a faithful picture of the surroundings of the farmer in the region of Galilee and Mount Lebanon. That primitive farmer does not sow his seed by means of "drills" in straight rows. Out of his leathern seed bag he takes generous handfuls of grains and, "in the name of the bounteous God," he casts the blessed seed into the soil, and then "covers it" by ploughing. The bridle paths which wind through the fields, and the still narrower footpaths which the wayfarers make through those fields every season in taking "short cuts" on their weary journeys, provide the chance for "some seeds" to fall "by the wayside," and be devoured by the fowls of the air. In certain sections of the country where I was brought up the "stony places" are the rule and the "good ground" the exception. So the seeds which "fell upon stony places" came up quickly "because they had no deepness of earth; and

when the sun was up, they were scorched." There is another reason for this than the shallowness of the soil. The almost utter lack of rain in that country from April to October leaves no chance for seed cast into shallow soil to live long.

"And some fell among the thorns; and the thorns sprang up, and choked them." For this the Syrian farmer himself is largely to blame. He preserves the thorns for cattle feed and for fuel. Certain kinds of thorns, especially *bellan*, are used as fuel for summer cooking, which is done out of doors, and for baking. Other thorns are harvested, after the barley and wheat harvest, threshed, and stored for winter feed. In the sixth verse of the seventh chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes the writer says, "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool."

When a boy it was a great delight to me to wander in the wheatfields when the grain had just passed the "milk stage" and had begun to mature and harden. It is then called *fereek*,

and is delicious to eat, either raw or roasted. I could subsist a whole day by plucking the heads of wheat, rubbing them in my hand and eating the fat, soft, fragrant grain. From time immemorial wayfarers in the East have been allowed to trespass in this manner, provided they carried no more grain away than that which they ate. It was this practice by the disciples, on the Sabbath, which caused the Pharisees' protest to Jesus to the effect that his followers dishonored the sacred day. In the sixth chapter of Saint Luke's Gospel, the first verse, it says, "Now it came to pass on a sabbath, that he was going through the grainfields; and his disciples plucked the ears, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. But certain of the Pharisees said, Why do ye that which is not lawful to do on the Sabbath? And Jesus answering them said,[1] Have ye not read even this, what David did, when he was hungry, he, and they that were with him; how he entered into the house of God, and took and ate the show-

[1] 1 Sam. xxi, 6.

bread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat save for the priests alone? And he said unto them, The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Threshing in Syria is done with the threshing-board (*nourej*), which is called in the Bible the "threshing instrument." The *nourej* resembles a stone-drag. It consists of two heavy pine planks joined together, and is about three feet wide and six feet long. On its under side are cut rows of square holes into which sharp stones are driven. It is these sharp stones which Isaiah refers to when he says, "Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument *having teeth;* thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff." [1] The sheaves are scattered on the threshing-floor about a foot deep; the thresher attaches the threshing-board to the yoke and sits on it, with his goad in his hand. As the oxen which "tread the corn" drag the heavy board round and round, the sharp stones cut the sheaves.

[1] Is. xli, 15. Revised Version.

In three days the "threshing" is ready to be sifted. The finely cut sheaves are thrown up into a heap and tossed up in the air with large wooden pitchforks. The breeze blows the chaff and straw away, leaving the heap of the golden grain in the center of the threshing-floor to gladden the eyes of the grateful tiller of the soil. To this "purging" of the threshing-floor — that is, the freeing of the wheat from the chaff and straw — Saint Luke alludes in the third chapter, the seventeenth verse, where he says, referring to Christ, "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner; but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable." The reference to the burning of the chaff is meant to show its comparative worthlessness. I am not aware that the Syrian farmer always takes the trouble to burn the chaff, which is not easy to gather after the wind has carried it away from the threshing-floor and scattered it over acres of ground. The coarser part of it, which falls near the floor, is gathered and saved to be used in mak-

ing the clay mortar with which the houses are plastered, and also sun-dried brick. We always went to the threshing-floor and secured a few bagfuls of chaff, which we used in the annual plastering of the floor of our house.

Among the chief joys of my boyhood days were those hours when I was permitted to sit on the threshing-board and goad the oxen which carried me round and round over the glistening, fragrant sheaves. I often bribed the owner to grant me the precious privilege; and even now I should in all probability prefer threshing after this manner to an automobile ride.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SHEPHERD

"I AM the good shepherd" is one of Jesus' most tender, most affectionate sayings. The first sixteen verses of the tenth chapter of Saint John's Gospel, from which this saying comes, should be joined to the twenty-third Psalm. As descriptive of shepherd life in the East, those two portions of Scripture belong together.

The various phases of shepherd life in Syria are deeply printed in my memory. Our mountain village home was situated on the upper slope of a rather steep hill, at the base of which a thin stream flowed over its rocky bed. Across the narrow ravine, on the lower slope

of another hill, just opposite our home, there were three sheep and goat folds. There for years I watched the shepherds and their flocks go out and come in, morning and evening, from early spring until late autumn. At that time of year the shepherds dismantled the folds by removing their thorny fences, pulled down their rude bowers, and led their flocks to the "lowlands," where they spent the short winter season. The cry of Isaiah, in the twelfth verse of the thirty-eighth chapter, "My dwelling is removed and is carried away from me as a shepherd's tent," reminds me very strongly of the easy removal and complete disappearance of that temporary shelter, which I so often saw torn down and carried away.

While at work in the fields cutting stone for my father's building operations in various parts of Mount Lebanon, the shepherds were all around us. In those days I watched the shepherd lead his flock "into the waters of rest," or the restful, refreshing waters, which the English version renders "still waters." I

watched him as, by deep, guttural sounds, whistling, certain words which the flock seemed to understand, and the flinging of pebbles or "smooth stones," such as those with which David smote Goliath, he guided, I might say invited, the "blessed creatures," into every nook and corner among the rocks where there was pasture. It was this sympathetic watchfulness of the shepherd which the writer of the twenty-third Psalm had in mind when he said, "The Lord is my shepherd, *I shall not want.*" In the heat of the day the shepherd made his flock "to lie down" in the pasture ground. The "blessed ones," as the shepherd always calls his sheep and goats, would fold their nimble legs and lie down, singly and in small groups, a surpassing picture of contentment, trustfulness, and peace. They seemed to realize that although they were in the wilderness they had nothing to fear. For the loving shepherd, with his strong and heavy staff, was in their midst to ward off all danger from them.

The opening verses of the tenth chapter of

the Gospel by Saint John contain most significant allusions to the sheepfold. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." Here the reference is to the fold of the dry season, such as those I have already mentioned. The winter sheepfold is a roofed stone hovel called *merah*. It has one low door and no windows; therefore, by climbing up the fold, "some other way," the robber could secure no booty. The roofless fold is called *hedherah* and is built of rough stones (such as are used in New England stone fences) to the height of five feet. Above the stone construction rises a high *seyaj* (hedge) of thorny branches, securely fastened between the stones. It is this hedge which is especially designed to prevent the "thief and robber" from climbing into the sheepfold.

"But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth

them out." The shepherd's rude tent is located near the door. There also his faithful dog lies. The word "porter" in the text refers more, perhaps, to Greek than Syrian custom. However, in case of large flocks, the undershepherd, or the "helper," who guards the door, answers to the "porter."

The calling of the sheep or goats by name should not be taken literally. The animals are not named as persons are. The shepherd *knows* all the members of his flock by certain individual marks, and realizes the fact quickly when one of them is lost. The more prominent ones are given adjectival names, such as the "pure white," the "striped," the "black," the "brown," the "gray-eared," etc. But it should be borne in mind that the saying, "And he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out," indicates the tender love of the shepherd for his flock, but not that the animals answer to their names. They are never trained to do that. He "leadeth them out," not by calling their names, but by giving certain sounds which they recognize.

"And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." The saying, "he goeth before them," has led many to believe that the shepherd goes before the flock always; that he always leads. So far as I know, this is not absolutely correct. *As a rule* the shepherd goes before the flock, but not infrequently he is seen behind it. The shepherd walks behind especially in the evening when the flock is on its way to the fold, in order that he may gather the stragglers and protect them from the stealthy wolf. The shepherd often walks by the side of the flock, at about the middle of the line. In case of large flocks the shepherd goes before, and the helper behind.

One of the great delights of my boyhood days was the sight of the "returning flock" every evening on the pebbly road on the side of the hill close by our house. I go up on the housetop at dusk. As soon as I hear the swishing roar of the multitude of little sharp hoofs on the stony road, which is like the sound of

an approaching hailstorm among the trees, then I know that the "blessed ones" are near. The long line of horny and hornless heads sweeps down the slope of the hill like an army on a "double quick." With his strong, protecting staff in hand, the stalwart, tender, ever-watchful shepherd appears at the end of the line. Like an over-shadowing Providence he *guides* his beloved flock safely over the little stream and into the fold.

The efficient, and, I might say, unerring, guidance of the shepherd is especially shown when he leads his flock in the "narrow paths." In Syria as a rule the fields are not fenced; the pastures and the planted fields are separated by narrow footpaths, and here and there by low stone walls, which are intended, however, more for landmarks than for fences. The fields are the forbidden ground. In transferring his flock from one pasture to another, the shepherd must not allow any of his animals to stray from the beaten path into the fields. For if he does, he will not only have to pay damages to the owners of the fields, but

will ruin his own reputation as a shepherd. In my home town we had a shepherd who was widely famed for his skill in leading his flock in the narrow paths. Sa'ied, who supplied our community with goat's milk during the summer, was often known to guide a flock of about one hundred and fifty head of goats (which are much more unruly than sheep) without a helper, in a narrow path or over a stone wall, for a considerable distance, without allowing a single one of them to set foot on the forbidden ground. The flock obeyed him because they *knew his voice* as that of their good shepherd.

It was no doubt such shepherds as Sa'ied that gave the writer of the twenty-third Psalm his telling figure. It was the faithful guidance of such earthly shepherds that led the ancient singer to meditate upon the Lord's faithfulness to his own, and to utter his faith in the line, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The fields of temptation lie on either side of the narrow path of life. The Lord will protect and lead in

the right path all those who know Him and hear his voice.

Another enchanting picture of Syrian pastoral life is the gathering of the flock. The shepherd seeks and gathers his sheep for the purpose of transferring them to a richer pasture, or, at the end of the day, to lead them back to the fold. He stands in the midst of the far-scattered flock and gives certain sounds, which are to the sheep what the notes of a bugle are to an army. His trained right arm, whose long range and sure aim are proverbial, sends the pebbles whirring in all directions, and thus "turns back" the more heedless of the flock. It was this which the Psalmist had in mind when he said, "He restoreth my soul," which means, "he turns back my soul," and refers to the action of the shepherd in turning the course of his sheep toward himself. The faithful shepherd never proceeds to lead his flock away until he is assured that all his dumb companions are gathered together.

With what tenderness does the prophet Ezekiel portray this pastoral scene when he

speaks of the infinite compassion of the divine shepherd of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps! In the thirty-fourth chapter, the eleventh verse, the promise to scattered Israel is, "For thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I, even I, will both search for my sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all the places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day. And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be; there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. . . . I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away."

The climax of the shepherd figure, as it is

used in the tenth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John, is reached in Christ's saying, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep," and in the twenty-third Psalm, in the passage, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." Only those who have heard the howling of a faithful shepherd at the approach of a wild beast to the flock can clearly realize how literally true is this saying of Christ's: "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

Of all the shepherds I have known or have known about in my native land, the commanding figure of one — Yusuf Balua' — rises most prominently before me. I shall never forget old Yusuf. He was over sixty when I first knew him. He was every inch a shepherd, having known no other occupation in all his life. I knew that rugged man in the "lowlands," where I spent two winters with my father, who was called thither to erect several farmhouses for the lord of the land. Yusuf, as

he himself expressed it, "revered" my father; therefore, I was always welcome to visit Yusuf at his cave in the rocky gorge, and to roam with him and his flock whenever my duties as my father's helper permitted.

The flocks are kept in the "lowlands" until after the "time of birth," which comes in March; then they are led up into the mountains. It was during that blessed time of birth, and while with Yusuf, that I first beheld the original of that infinitely tender picture which is drawn in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah, the eleventh verse, and which is also Christ's most appealing picture. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd," says the prophet; "he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." It was that which Yusuf Balua' was doing once when I happened to be with him. His roughly hewn figure stands now before me, with three newly born lambs held close to his bosom, and their wilted heads resting on his massive arm. He walked gently before the anxious, slowly moving mothers,

which came close behind him, giving low, humming sounds, through which Nature poured out her compassionate heart.

"Let me carry one of them," I begged Yusuf. "No, my boy, not the helpless ones," answered the tender friend. "They need the shepherd's care now. Besides, the mothers don't know you and they would fear." But they knew *his* voice and followed him!

Oh, if we will but know and trust and follow our heavenly Shepherd, as the sheep trust and follow theirs!

But I must not lose sight of what I have called the climax of the shepherd figure in the Gospel and the Psalms; namely, the shepherd's interposing with his own life between the flock and the wolf. The wolf, the hyena, and the leopard are the flock's most dangerous foes. During his long life Yusuf fought many battles with those ferocious beasts, but never lost a hoof to them in all those encounters. On more than one occasion he followed the hyena to his lair, and, by his howling, flinging his deadly stones with his sling and

striking with his heavy staff on the rocks, compelled the beast to abandon his prey. Whether the unfortunate sheep was yet alive or whether it had died, Yusuf, as a good and faithful shepherd, always carried it back to the fold.

To this care and devotion of the shepherd, Jesus also alludes where he speaks of his having "come to save that which was lost." "How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish!" [1]

When I think of that deep, rocky gorge where Yusuf wintered with his flock, and the many similar valleys which the Syrian shepherds have to go through daily; when I think

[1] Matt. xviii, 12-14.

of the wild beasts they have to fight, of the scars they bear on their bodies as marks of their boundless devotion to their flocks, I realize very clearly the depth of the Psalmist's faith when he said, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

CHAPTER XXIII

JESUS AND HIS MOTHER

One of the perplexing passages in the New Testament is that found in the fourth verse of the second chapter of Saint John's Gospel, where Jesus says to his mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" That it has been very difficult for many sincere readers of the Bible to reconcile this passage to the Master's gentleness and goodness is very well known to me. On numerous occasions I have been asked to give my interpretation of this saying in the light of the position of woman in the East, and to state whether, in my opinion as a Syrian, Jesus could have meant to be harsh and disrespectful to his mother.

There are those who believe that the Master did speak harshly to his mother on that particular occasion. Once I heard a man, who was none too friendly toward Christianity, say that Jesus "simply lost his temper." I know that this man was completely wrong. Another more respectful, but not altogether correct, opinion is that in the East woman is not very highly respected, therefore it is customary for men to speak harshly to women. So according to this idea Jesus treated his mother as the Orientals treat womankind in general.

My purpose in this chapter is to try to show exactly what Jesus meant when he said to his mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" In order to do this it is necessary to describe, though briefly, woman's position in Syrian society.

What is an obvious fact, one which can by no means be ignored, even by the most devoted friend of the East, is that the Eastern woman is far from being the equal of her Western sister, either in culture or in domes-

tic and social privileges. Perhaps in no other country does woman enjoy these blessings to the extent to which the American woman enjoys them. The Western type of woman is now partially represented in my native land by a minority of cultivated women, but their number is comparatively very small.

Oriental social customs give man the preference. To give woman the social and domestic prominence, the little attentions and courtesies which she enjoys in America, is to the Orientals not only unnecessary, but uncomplimentary to both sexes.

It is perhaps for lack of such attentions and courtesies, more than for anything else, that the Occidentals consider the Oriental woman to be the slave of her husband. And, on the other hand, because of his giving the precedence to woman in all the courtesies and comforts of life, the Orientals, *both men and women*, consider the Occidental to be the slave of his wife. How often have I heard Syrians say, "An *affrenjee* [that is, a European] is quite a man until his wife whispers some-

thing to him. Then he becomes her slave; he does just what she tells him."

The Oriental's indifference to those fine points of behavior toward woman does not spring from the fact that he considers her to be really his inferior, and consequently his slave. I never had the slightest reason to believe that my mother was in any way my father's inferior. "Thou shalt honour thy father *and* thy mother" is a commandment which was born of the deepest life of the East. I can think of no circumstances in Eastern life which compel a Syrian to think of his mother, sister, and wife in other than terms of equality in all essentials with the male members of the family. In my judgment it is the Oriental's deportment, rather than his real intentions, which condemns him in the sight of Occidentals for his attitude toward woman.

The Easterner is not so fond of fixed rules of conduct as the Westerner is, especially in the world of friendship. To him formalities have no claim upon those who are true friends and social equals. "When love occurs formal-

ities cease" is one of the Oriental's ancient and highly prized sayings. From early childhood the Americans are taught to observe, even within the family circle, the niceties of "Please," "Thank you," "Pardon me," "I beg your pardon," "May I trouble you," and so forth. To a son of the East such behavior is altogether proper among strangers, but not among those who really *love one another*. Between husband and wife, parent and child, brothers and sisters, and true friends such formalities appear to Easterners not only superficial, but utterly ridiculous. For such persons the most essential thing is that they should at heart love and respect one another.

I believe it can be easily seen that the Easterner's attitude toward woman, which now rises to the height of religious reverence, now approaches contempt, is to be traced to his uneven, juvenile temperament and lack of culture, and not to the fact that he despises her. So long as he respects her "in his heart" and is ready to defend her at whatever cost, he considers the fine points of conduct toward

her after the American fashion to be simply unnecessary little details. In cultivated Syrian homes the women are free and highly respected by the men. Such women have no reason to envy even the happiest American women.

So woman in the East is not considered a slave by the man, and there is a multitude of wife-ruled husbands.

Perhaps nowhere else is the Syrian attitude toward woman so clearly stated as in the teachings of Saint Paul. In the third chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, the twenty-eighth verse, Paul says, "There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." In the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the "Apostle to the Gentiles" rises to the noblest height of Eastern thought concerning woman and reveals Christianity's sanctifying power. Beginning at the twenty-fifth verse, he says: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it, . . . that he might present

it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Even so ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."

In the East man is more prominent socially than woman, not because she is considered a slave. This custom has been established, because, owing to the continuance of warfare among the small nations and tribes in that part of the world for ages, the man has had to be the protector of the woman. Therefore, in order to protect her he has had to keep her somewhat secluded and to take the social duties toward strangers upon himself.

Notwithstanding all these social conventions, however, the mother has a right to demand from her children the same loving obedience which they accord to their father. They must honor their father and their mother alike. Upon coming home from a journey

I always saluted my parents by kissing their hands, as a mark of loving submission. According to custom, I saluted my father first, and my mother second, but in the same identical manner, and invoked their *radha* (good pleasure) toward me, with religious reverence. I always knew that to be disrespectful to my mother and disobey her was not only bad manners, but a sin.

That, I am convinced, was Jesus' position. While he had to differ with his mother at a certain time, that is, before she realized the greatness of his message and accepted it, nevertheless he continued to love and respect her. So notwithstanding the seeming harshness in the English translation of his saying, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" I find no real reason to believe that in uttering it Jesus indicated that he was angry, or that he meant to be disrespectful to his mother. This somewhat impersonal form of address to a woman is very common in the East. It *might* be so spoken as to mean disrespect, but as a rule, and according to the Oriental man-

ner of speech, it is dignified and in good taste. However, this impersonal form of address is employed by a man when speaking to a woman who is a stranger to him. The correct form is, "O woman," the same which Jesus used in the fifteenth chapter of Matthew, the twenty-eighth verse, saying to the "woman of Canaan," "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." In the same manner the Master assured the woman who had "a spirit of infirmity," [1] "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity." A superb example of this Oriental usage is found in the fourth chapter of Saint John's Gospel, the twenty-first verse, in Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman. With great dignity he says to her: "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

From the foregoing examples it may easily

[1] Luke XIII, 12.

be seen that the form of Jesus' address to his mother could not be considered disrespectful. Therefore the difficulty which the text offers comes from the fact that it represents Jesus as speaking to his own mother as he would speak to a woman *who was a stranger to him.* Why did he do that?

Here is a very interesting point to consider while reading the four Gospels. The above incident is mentioned only in Saint John's Gospel. Now, while the other three Gospels speak more particularly of Jesus' earthly life and ministry, Saint John's Gospel speaks of Jesus as the divine Son of God. Therefore as such he was above all earthly connections. His mother was only human. On the occasion of his addressing her as a stranger she is represented as interfering with him as he was about to work a miracle. Such a thing, according to Saint John's Gospel, was beyond her understanding. Consequently as a *divine* being speaking to a *human* being, Jesus said to his earthly mother, "Woman, what is mine and what is thine?" This is the original form. The

English translation, "Woman, what have I to do with thee," is good, although the more refined attitude of the West toward woman makes the expression seem rather harsh. Stated in simplest terms the Oriental understanding of these words is, "Leave me alone." In Jesus' case the further meaning of the passage is that, as Mary's vision of spiritual things was not Jesus' vision, even though he was her son in the flesh, she was not competent to exercise authority over him, seeing that he was a divine being. In a higher sense she was a stranger to him.

With real consistency the writer of the Fourth Gospel clings to the faith in Jesus' divinity to the end. In the nineteenth chapter we find the Master speaking from the cross. He speaks, not as a human sufferer, but as a triumphant heavenly being. He addresses his mother in the same manner as he did at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee — "Woman." In the twenty-fifth verse it is said: "Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary,

the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!" In this lofty yet tender manner the Master committed his loving mother to the care of his beloved disciple.

The Syrian Christ is the world Christ. Through him the spirit of the Father spoke and still speaks to the world. While on the earth in the flesh he spoke to men in the language and manner of the country in which he was born. He used the manner of speech of his people and their simple customs as means to express great divine truths. Family life, the market-place, the shepherd, the sower, the vine and fig tree, the lilies, the sheep, the coin, the lamp, and many other very common things he made the way to truth and life. He was a young man, yet because the spirit of the Father dwelt in him he imparted sacredness to everything he touched and stands today the hope of the world. From him we learn that the smallest and most common

thing may, if used in the right way, become an instrumentality of love, joy, and peace. His disciples also were of the common people. They followed very humble occupations. Yet when his spirit entered into them they became spiritual heroes. They were blessed and made a blessing to the whole world.

The Christ way remains open to all those who would walk in it and become Christlike. It is open neither to the great alone, nor to the humble alone; neither to the old as a class, nor to the young as a class; but to all who would hear Christ's voice and follow him. And when this troubled world of ours listens sincerely to his voice and makes his Gospel of truth and love the law of life, then it will have true happiness and lasting peace.

THE END

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